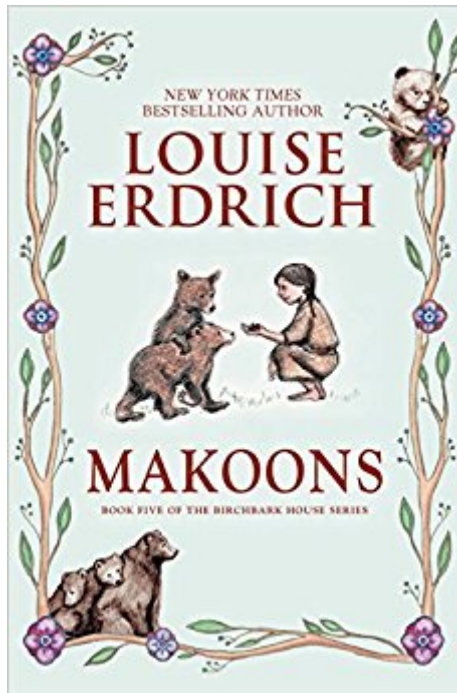




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# Makoons (Birchbark House)



## Synopsis

In the sequel to *Chickadee*, acclaimed author Louise Erdrich continues her award-winning Birchbark House series with the story of an Ojibwe family in nineteenth-century America. Named for the Ojibwe word for little bear, Makoons and his twin, Chickadee, have traveled with their family to the Great Plains of Dakota Territory. There they must learn to become buffalo hunters and once again help their people make a home in a new land. But Makoons has had a vision that foretells great challenges—challenges that his family may not be able to overcome. Based on Louise Erdrich's own family history, this fifth book in the series features black-and-white interior illustrations, a note from the author about her research, as well as a map and glossary of Ojibwe terms.

## Book Information

Lexile Measure: 850 (What's this?)

Series: Birchbark House (Book 5)

Hardcover: 176 pages

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Average Customer Review: 4.5 out of 5 stars 9 customer reviews

Best Sellers Rank: #187,524 in Books (See Top 100 in Books) #140 in [Books > Children's Books > Geography & Cultures > Multicultural Stories > Native North & South Americans](#) #244 in [Books > Children's Books > Literature & Fiction > Historical Fiction > United States > 1800s](#) #492 in [Books > Children's Books > Growing Up & Facts of Life > Family Life >](#)

Multigenerational

Age Range: 8 - 12 years

Grade Level: 3 - 7

## Customer Reviews

Gr 4-6-In the newest addition to this series, Erdrich continues her excellent storytelling relating more adventures of a small clan of Ojibwe in the 1860s. Eight-year-old Makoons, or Little Bear, recovers from his heartsick-induced illness (as described in *Chickadee* [HarperCollins, 2012]) and dreams a

vision full of joy and sorrow. Makoons and his twin, Chickadee, travel with their family from western Minnesota to the Dakota Territory in search of "the generous ones"-buffalo. The two boys are full of mischief, inseparable as they hunt, explore, and grow. They are also a great help to their family as they call the buffalo when the adults begin to despair at having a successful hunt. Information about hunting, packing, foraging, and preparing food is incredibly detailed, but in no way tedious. The family work together tirelessly, knowing their survival depends on it. Ojibwe culture, language, and customs are interwoven throughout. Character development is a great strength in Erdrich's writing; she has a knack for creating humorous and endearing characters, and this story is no exception. Pencil drawings throughout, especially those of Makoons learning to ride a horse and hunt, help readers visualize the narrative. As the plot progresses, Makoons changes in a surprising way, bringing the heartbreaking fulfillment of his dream. This beautiful novel is quick moving and deeply affecting. VERDICT Readers will thoroughly enjoy following Makoons and learning about Ojibwe life.-Lisa Crandall, formerly at the Capital Area District Library, Holt, MI  
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#### GLOWING PRAISE FOR THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE SERIES PRAISE FOR MAKOOONS:

“Erdrich continues her excellent storytelling. She has a knack for creating humorous and endearing characters. This beautiful novel is quick moving and deeply affecting. Readers will thoroughly enjoy following Makoons and learning about Ojibwe life.” (School Library Journal (starred review))  
“Erdrich’s direct narrative voice brings readers right into Makoons’s world. A new addition to the Birchbark House saga, launched in 1999, is always an anticipated event.” (ALA Booklist)  
“Warm intergenerational moments abound. Erdrich provides fascinating information about Ojibwe daily life. Readers will be enriched by Erdrich’s finely crafted corrective to the Eurocentric dominant narrative of America’s past.” (Horn Book (starred review))  
“Erdrich’s simple text and delicate pencil illustrations provide a detailed, honest portrait of Plains life. A warm and welcome addition to the unfolding saga of a 19th-century Ojibwe family.” (Kirkus Reviews)  
PRAISE FOR CHICKADEE: “A beautifully evolving story of an indigenous American family.” (Kirkus Reviews (starred review))  
“Readers will absorb the history lesson almost by osmosis; their full attention will be riveted on the story. Every detail anticipates readers’ interest.” (The Horn Book)  
“Erdrich’s storytelling is masterful. Readers will be more than happy to welcome little Chickadee into their hearts.” (School Library Journal (starred review))  
“In the fourth book in Erdrich’s

award-winning Birchbark House series, the focus moves to a new generation. As always, the focus is on the way-of-life details as much as the adventure. Most affecting are the descriptions of Makoons's loneliness without his brother. (ALA Booklist) "The pleasures of reading the series are not unlike those of reading Laura Ingalls Wilder: Discovering an earlier time in our country through stories of the daily lives of children. (Newsday.com) PRAISE FOR THE PORCUPINE YEAR: "Based on Erdrich's own family history, the mischievous celebration will move readers, and so will the anger and sadness. What is left unspoken is as powerful as the story told. (Booklist (starred review)) PRAISE FOR THE GAME OF SILENCE: "Readers who loved Omakayas and her family in The Birchbark House (1999) have ample reason to rejoice in this beautifully constructed sequel | Hard not to hope for what comes next for this radiant nine-year old. (Kirkus Reviews (starred review)) "Erdrich's charming pencil drawings interspersed throughout and her glossary of Ojibwe terms round out a beautiful offering. (School Library Journal (starred review)) "Erdrich's gifts are many, and she has given readers another tale full of rich details of 1850's Ojibwe life, complicated supporting characters, and all the joys and challenges of a girl becoming a woman. (Horn Book (starred review)) PRAISE FOR THE BIRCHBARK HOUSE: "[A] lyrical narrative. Readers will want to follow this family for many seasons to come. (Publishers Weekly (starred review)) "The Birchbark House establishes its own ground, in the vicinity of Laura Ingalls Wilder's Little House books. (New York Times Book Review) "Why has no one written this story before? (ALA Booklist (boxed review)) "Erdrich's captivating tale of four seasons portrays a deep appreciation of our environment, our history, and our Native American sisters and brothers. (School Library Journal)

My daughter read this in one day, she was so excited it had come. If you've read the other Birchbark House books, you won't be disappointed. As a stand-alone, I think it would still be very moving. And plenty of humor, standing alongside the sadness-- neither one cancelling the other out. We're also so pleased the author continues to put Ojibwemowin in these books! Wonderful story on many levels. You can enjoy it just as entertainment, but there's so much more than that, for child and adult readers.

excellent

This one is going to be brought to the attention of our city library, children's department. In fact I might volunteer to read parts of it myself to the little ones Saturday Library Club.

A good read, but not the best in the series. Ended rather abruptly. I enjoy learning about the native people of our nation. Although it is written for children, it is informative and suitable for all ages.

Thank you.

I like her adult books better.

They say these days you can't sell a novel for kids anymore without the book having some kind of "sequel potential". That's not really true, but there are a heck of a lot of series titles out there for the 7 to 12-year-old set, that's for sure. New series books for children are by their very definition sort of odd for kids, though. If you're an adult and you discover a new series, waiting a year or two for the next book to come out is a drop in the bucket. Years fly by for grown-ups. The wait may be mildly painful but it's not going to crush you. But series for kids? That's another matter entirely. Two years go by and the child has suddenly become an entirely different person. They may have switched their loyalties from realistic historical fiction to fantasy or science fiction or (heaven help us) romance even! It almost makes more sense just to hand them series that have already completed their runs, so that they can speed through them without breaking the spell. Almost makes more sense . . . but not quite. Not so long as there are series like "The Birchbark House Series" by Louise Erdrich. It is quite possibly the only historical fiction series currently underway for kids that has lasted as long as fourteen years and showing no sign of slowing down until it reaches its conclusion four books from now, Erdrich proves time and time again that she's capable of ensnaring new readers and engaging older ones without relying on magic, mysteries, or post-apocalyptic mayhem. And if she manages to grind under her heel a couple stereotypes about what a book about American Indians in the past is "supposed" to be (boring/serious/depressing) so much the better. Chickadee is back, and not a second too soon. Had he been returned to his twin brother from his kidnapping any later, it's possible that Makoons would have died of the fever that has taken hold of his body. As it is, Chickadee nurses his brother back to health, but not before Makoons acquires terrifying visions of what is to come. Still, there's no time

to dwell on that. The buffalo are on the move and his family and tribe are dedicated to sustaining themselves for the winter ahead. There are surprises along the way as well. A boasting braggart by the name of Gichi Noodin has joined the hunt, and his posturing and preening are as amusing to watch as his mistakes are vast. The tough as nails Two Strike has acquired a baby lamb and for reasons of her own is intent on raising it. And the twin brothers adopt a baby buffalo of their own, though they must protect it against continual harm. All the while the world is changing for Makoons and his family. Soon the buffalo will leave, more settlers will displace them, and three members of the family will leave, never to return. Fortunately, family sustains, and while the future may be bleak, the present has a lot of laughter and satisfaction waiting at the end of the day. While I have read every single book in this series since it began (and I don't tend to follow any other series out there, except possibly "Lockwood & Co.") I don't reread previous books when a new one comes out. I don't have to. Neither, I would argue, would your kids. Each entry in this series stands on its own two feet. Erdrich doesn't spend inordinate amounts of time catching the reader up, but you still understand what's going on. And you just love these characters. The books are about family, but with "Makoons" I really felt the storyline was more about making your own family than the family you're born into. At the beginning of this book Makoons offers the dire prediction that he and his brother will be able to save their family members, but not all of them. Yet by the story's end, no matter what happened, the family has technically only decreased by two people, because of the addition of another. Erdrich has never been afraid of filling her books with a goodly smattering of death, dismemberment, and blood. I say that, but these do not feel like bloody books in the least. They have a gentleness about them that is remarkable. Because we are dealing with a tribe of American Indians (Ojibwe, specifically) in 1866, you expect this book to be like all the other ones out there. Is there a way to tell this story without lingering on the harm caused by the American government to Makoons, his brother, and his people? Makoons and his family always seem to be outrunning the worst of the American government's forces, but they can't run forever. Still, I think it's important that the books concentrate far more on their daily lives and loves and sorrows, only mentioning the bloodthirsty white settlers on occasion and when appropriate. It's almost as if the reader is being treated in the same way as Makoons and his brother. We're getting some of the picture but we're being spared its full bloody horror. That is not to say that this is a whitewashed narrative. It isn't at all. But it's nice that every

book about American Indians of the past isn't exactly the same.

They're allowed to be silly and to have jokes and fun moments too. That humor begs a question of course. Question: When is it okay to laugh at a character in a middle grade novel these days? It's not a simple question. With a high concentration on books that promote kindness rather than bullying, laughing at any character, even a bad guy, is a tricky proposition. And that goes double if the person you're laughing at is technically on your side. Thank goodness for self-delusion. As long as a character refuses to be honest with him or herself, the reader is invited to ridicule them alongside the other characters. It may not be nice, but in the world of children's literature it's allowed. So meet Gichi Noodin, a pompous jackass of a man. This is the kind of guy who could give Narcissus lessons in self-esteem. He's utterly in love with his own good looks, skills, you name it. For this reason he's the Falstaff of the book (without the melancholy). He serves a very specific purpose in the book as the reader watches his rise, his fall, and his redemption.

It's not very often that the butt of a book's jokes is given a chance to redeem himself, but Gichi Noodin does precisely that. That storyline is a small part of the book, smaller even than the tale of Two Strike's lamb, but I loved the larger repercussions. Even the butt of the joke can save the day, given the chance. As with all her other books Erdrich does a E.L. Konigsburg and illustrates her own books (and she can even do horses! HORSES!). Her style is, as ever, reminiscent of Garth Williams' with soft graphite pencil renderings of characters and scenes. These are spotted throughout the chapters regularly, and combined with the simplicity of the writing they make the book completely appropriate bedtime reading for younger ages. The map at the beginning is particularly keen since it not only highlights the locations in each part of the story but also hints at future storylines to come. Of these pictures the sole flaw is the book jacket. You see the cover of this book is a touch on the misleading side since at no point in this story does Makoons ever attempt to feed any baby bears (a terrible idea, namesake or no). Best to warn literal minded kids from the start that that scene is not happening. It is interesting that the name of this book is "Makoons" since Chickadee shares as much of the spotlight, if not a little more so, than his sickly brother. That said, it is Makoons who has the vision of the future, Makoons who offers the haunting prediction at the story's start, and Makoons who stares darkly into an unknown void at the end, alone in the misery he knows is certain to come. Makoons is the Cassandra of this story, his predictions never believed until they are too late. And yet, this isn't a sad or depressing book. The hope that emanates off the pages survives the buffalos' sad

departure, the sickness that takes two beloved characters, and the knowledge that the only thing this family can count on in the future is change. But they have each other and they are bound together tightly. Even Pinch, that trickster of previous books, is acquiring an odd wisdom and knowledge of his own that may serve the family well into the future. Folks often recommend these books as progressive alternatives to Laura Ingalls Wilder's "Little House" books, but that's doing them a disservice. Each one of these titles stands entirely on its own, in a world of its own making. This isn't some sad copy of Wilder's style but a wholly original series of its own making. The kid who starts down the road with this family is going to want to go with them until the end. Even if it takes another fourteen years. Even if they end up reading the last few books to their own children. Whatever it takes, we're all in this together, readers, characters, and author. Godspeed, Louise Erdrich. For ages 7-12.

"I do not need a marker for my passage, for my creator knows where I am. I do not want anyone to cry. I lived a good life, my hair turned to snow, I saw my great grand children, I grew my garden." Louise Erdrich, 'Makoons,' book five of 'The Birch Bark House' series. These sweet chapter books are appropriate for good readers aged 10 and above. They would also make lovely family or class room read-a-louds, helping children expand their vocabularies, develop reading comprehension, and providing a holistic look at a culture that may be different than their own. As an adult, I enjoy them also. :) 'The Birch Bark House' series tells the story of multiple generations of an Ojibwa family, focusing on the young people, and starting with the traditional times before contact with settlers. 'Makoons' concludes with the families assimilation into the interstices of plains and metis cultures, after their forced migration from their home land. This history, as painful as it is, is gently told. The focus is on life and living, creative adaption, using traditional skills and personal strengths while learning new skills and developing new strengths. Erdrich is a master at crafting lovable believable characters. Through these characters we see a way of life that is close to the earth, close to nature, entwined with gardens, and in loving respect with our Creator. This series provides us with a glimpse of a movable utopia. One that survives adversity and recreates itself in new places--through respect, love, and creative adaptation. Important lessons for our world today. :)

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