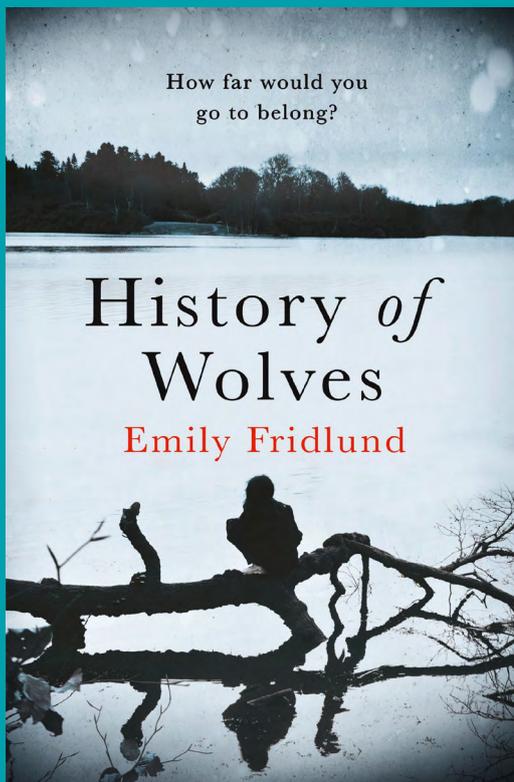


Reader's Guide



History of Wolves Emily Fridlund

Weidenfeld & Nicolson

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About the author

Emily Fridlund was born in 1979 and grew up in Minnesota. She holds an MFA from Washington University in St. Louis and a PhD in Literature and Creative Writing from the University of Southern California. Her collection of stories, *Catapult*, was chosen by Ben Marcus for the Mary McCarthy Prize and will be published by Sarabande Books. She lives in the Finger Lakes region of New York. *History of Wolves* is her first novel.

About the book

Linda, age 14, lives on a dying commune on the edge of a lake in the Midwest of America. She and her parents are the last remaining inhabitants, the others having long since left amid bitter acrimony. She has grown up isolated both by geography and her understanding of the world, and is an outsider at school, regarded as a freak.

One day she notices the arrival of a young family in a cabin on the opposite side of the lake. She starts to befriend them, first their four-year-old son Paul, and then his young mother Patra, who is also lonely and isolated. For the first time she feels a sense of belonging that has been missing from her life.

Leo, the father, is a university professor and an enigmatic figure, perpetually absent. When he returns home, Linda is shunned by the family unit. Desperate to be accepted again, she struggles to resume her place in their home and fails to see the terrible warning signals, which have such devastating consequences.

What the judges thought

The judges declared this novel to be 'magically vivid' and 'very, very subtle'. An acute psychoanalysis of unparented children, it has, they believed, 'a slow, unfolding mystery to it – questions that need to be answered about regret and religion and the way people act towards their kin'.

Discussion points

We hear from both the isolated teenager and adult version of Linda. To what extent does her narrative voice change?

This is a novel about belonging – within a family, a school, and a community. Could Linda have done anything differently to have found a place to belong?

Compare Linda's parents with Patra, Leo and Paul. In what ways did they differ?

What is the role of the teacher Mr Grierson? Was there anything genuine in his encouragement of Linda or were his intentions always bad?

How well do you think Fridlund tackled the subject of strong religious belief and the impact it can have on children?

You are aware of the fates of several characters early on in the novel – does this heighten the building of tragedy or take away from the narrative tension?

Useful links

www.latimes.com/books/jacketcopy/la-ca-jc-history-of-wolves-20170105-story

www.npr.org/2017/01/03/507162378/beautiful-icy-history-of-wolves-transcends-genre

www.powells.com/post/interviews/powells-interview-emily-fridlund-author-of-history-of-wolves