

# Study Guide for Eden Robinson's *Monkey Beach*



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## Plot Summary

As the book begins, Lisa wakes up as her parents are preparing to leave to help with the search to find her brother who is missing at sea. Lisa remains behind in the village. Lisa decides to join her parents, however, she cannot find a flight which will quickly take her to where they are, so she decides to take her family's motorboat on a long journey along the Pacific Ocean coast to get there. Along the way, something horrible happens, and she either almost drowns and is rescued by her brother, almost drowns and gets a vision from her dead brother to send a message to his girlfriend, or drowns.

Intertwined with this sequence of events is a series of flashbacks in which we learn about Lisa's life up until this point.

Lisa is born and raised in the village by her parents and a number of aunts, her grandmother, and her uncle. She grows close to her uncle and grandmother and is devastated when they die. After they die she leaves for Vancouver where she loses herself in the party scene. After receiving a vision that her best friend has died, she meets up with another friend and returns to the village. Once home, she grows close to her brother. Her brother falls in love, but upon finding out that his soon-to-be fiancée was raped by another man he takes a fishing job with the man and kills him on the ocean after sinking their boat.

# Characters in the Novel

**Lisa:** Lisamarie Michelle Hill, main character. Teenage girl in the late 1980s.

**Ma-ma-oo:** Lisa's paternal grandmother. Lisa is close to her grandmother, and the grandmother teaches Lisa to connect with the land and the spirit world. Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa a new Haisla word everyday, tells her the history of places, and teaches her resource harvesting traditions. Ma-ma-oo also tells Lisa about her family history.

**Ba-ba-oo:** Lisa's late paternal grandfather. He died before Lisa knew him. He was violent towards his wife, but his wife holds no ill-will.

**Albert:** Al, Lisa's dad

**Gladys:** Lisa's mom

**Mick:** Michael, Lisa's paternal uncle. Mick takes Lisa out on the ocean to check the family nets and is close to Lisa. Mick left home to join the American Indian Movement and returned home after a long absence. Mick is jovial and has a good relationship with his brother, Al. Mick is also close to Lisa's mom and has a good relationship with Ma-ma-oo. While Mick does drink and smoke, it is not to the extent that it harms his relationships with those around him. Having lost his first wife, Mick lives alone as a sort of rootless bachelor, and the possibility that he will leave again is always looming.

**Jimmy:** Lisa's younger brother.

**Trudy:** Lisa's paternal aunt and Tab's mother. Drinks heavily and dates Josh.

Neglects/verbally abuses her daughter and hates Ma-ma-oo. Her real name is Getrude, but she won't let anyone call her that.

**Aunt Kate:** Lisa's paternal aunt. Lisa doesn't like going to Aunt Kate's because she supervises them too closely. Erica's mother.

**Uncle Geordie:** Lisa's paternal great uncle.

**Aunt Edith:** Lisa's paternal great uncle's wife.

**The little man:** a spiritual apparition that appears to Lisa before something happens. Comes from a cedar tree. She cannot understand her premonitions, and so is often frustrated with the little man.

**B'gwus:** sasquatch

**Spotty:** Jimmy's crow.

**Queen of the North:** Josh's boat, which Jimmy has gone out on with Josh, and which is lost at sea.

**Frank:** Lisa's friend. Is the school bully in the beginning of the novel, along with friends Pooch and Cheese, however, becomes Lisa's friend later in the novel. While Frank is romantically interested in Lisa, they both date other people throughout the course of the book.

**Pooch:** Lisa's friend, and for a period towards the end of the book, boyfriend. Frank's cousin.

**Cheese:** Lisa's friend for a period in the book, described by another character as creepy. Frank's cousin.

**Tab:** Tabitha, Aunt Trudy's daughter, Lisa's closest friend and cousin.

**Erica:** a girl Lisa's age who is very popular in the village. She is the Queen Bee of Lisa's age group and because Lisa sees her as shallow and preoccupied with trivial things like her hair, Lisa's friendship with Erica is strained, at best. Erica is also Lisa's cousin.

**J.J.:** Erica's older brother

**Josh:** Mick's friend, Trudy's on again off again boyfriend, someone in the novel says that there's something not right about him.

**Adeline:** a girl from the village who is strikingly beautiful, much more so than Erica. Introduced to us when both Adeline and Lisa are children, Adeline grows up to be a hard drinker, fighter, and takes on the nickname Karaoke later in the novel. Towards the end of the novel, Adeline and Jimmy begin a romantic relationship. Adeline is also Frank's cousin and Josh's niece.

**Ronny:** Adeline's sidekick, Frank's girl cousin.

**Mrs. Jenkins:** Lisa's psychologist, who she sees once.

**Cookie:** Mick's A.I.M. wife. Mick and Cookie married through a medicine man, broke up and made up many times. Cookie was killed in a suspicious accident.

**Annabella:** Jimmy's eighth-grade girlfriend.

**mimayus:** Lisa's paternal grandmother's sister. She was beautiful, and left the village to be closer to a man that she loved, however, upon her arrival he died on a boat in a storm. Died before Lisa knew her.

**Bib:** Frank's older brother

**Julie:** Frank's girlfriend for a portion of the novel.

**Alexis:** Lisa's cat, named after a character on her grandmother's favorite soap opera, Dynasty

**Screwy Ruby:** a destitute woman in the village who chases coins when kids roll them down the street. Rumored to be a witch.

# Themes

**Spiritual awareness:** Lisa grapples with a gift. First, she is able to see a little man that often appears before something bad happens. Second, she often has dreams with people in her life or symbols which warn her of events to come or help her grapple with struggles in her life. Third, throughout the book she increasingly sees ghosts. Fourth, towards the end of the book she begins sleepwalking. Lisa flirts with bad intentions, and is often called to by spirits to help her solve her problems through a meat offering. The spirit world is understood in a metaphor of a medicinal plant which is very powerful, but also very dangerous if you don't know what you're doing with it. Lisa seeks guidance for her gift through her grandmother, Ma-ma-oo, however, when Ma-ma-oo passes Lisa no longer has someone to turn to for guidance, and her descent into drugs and alcohol is in part a reaction to the increasing presence of her gift without someone there to assist her in understanding it. Lisa's father does not understand her gift at all, Lisa's mother has some of the gift but denies it, and Lisa's uncle Mick is open to her gift, but cannot serve as a guide to her like Ma-ma-oo can. Lisa's brother is not receptive to her gift. At one point, another character, Cheese, ostracized Lisa because of her gift.

**Grief:** Early in the book, we learn that Lisa's uncle Mick grieves for his wife who died in a mysterious accident. His grief shows itself in nightmares he has where he calls out her name. Lisa's grandmother does not grieve for her dead husband because he abused her. Lisa's Aunt Trudy grieves for her childhood as she grew up with her abusive father and then was sent to residential school. Aunt Trudy deals with her grief by abusing alcohol and blaming Lisa's grandmother. As the novel goes on, Lisa loses her uncle Mick and grieves by turning numb and withdrawing from her usual friends and from school. When Ma-ma-oo dies, Lisa responds by losing herself in a cycle of alcohol and drug abuse. She returns to the village after the death of a friend and tries to deal with her pain by going back to school and focusing on a goal. Her brother, Jimmy, deals with the grief of losing his goal of qualifying as an Olympic swimmer in an accident, and he responds with rage, followed by alcohol abuse. His grief subsides when he falls in love and begins a relationship with Adelaine, however, when she leaves him his rage followed by alcohol abuse resumes until she returns and they rekindle their romance.

**Sexual assault:** It is alluded to that one of the main characters, Josh, was sexually abused by a priest in residential school. Josh then goes on to rape Adelaine, who aborts the resulting pregnancy. A car full of white men threatens Erica with sexual assault in Terrace, and when Lisa intervenes they threaten her. Lisa's Aunt Trudy explains that while they could not publicly abduct a white girl, because Lisa is native she is expected by society to be a slut, therefore it is possible that the men could have abducted her off the street and assaulted her. Lisa's friend Cheese drugs her and assaults her, then tells Frank, who likes Lisa, that it was consensual. Jimmy finds out about Josh's sexual assault on Adelaine and goes on to kill him in revenge.

**Sibling relationships:** At first Jimmy is Lisa's annoying tag-along little brother. Then, Jimmy becomes a competitive swimmer and Lisa has a hard time relating to him because swimming takes over his life. Jimmy wants to become an Olympic swimmer, and the attention that he gets from swimming draws the attention of girls at school. Throughout the course of the novel, Jimmy becomes increasingly popular and successful in school, while Lisa becomes more isolated and less successful. Lisa likes to go Christmas tree hunting in the woods, while Jimmy doesn't see the point. While Jimmy is skeptical about spiritual matters (yet remains superstitious by feeding his crows), spiritual matters play a large role in Lisa's life. While Lisa is close to Ma-ma-oo and Mick, Jimmy is engrossed in swimming. As Lisa's drug and alcohol use

increases, Jimmy maintains his health as an athlete. Towards the end of the book, both gain a better understanding of each other as Jimmy understands Lisa's grief over the death of their uncle and grandmother and Lisa understands Jimmy's goal-driven behaviour through her desire to graduate high school before he does. In the end, Lisa tries to save Jimmy by taking him out on a boat to dry out after his girlfriend leaves him, and Jimmy saves Lisa by helping her with her schoolwork. Jimmy eventually ends up with his crush, while Lisa avoids a relationship with Frank who is interested in her.

**Death and disfigurement:** While Ma-ma-oo presents an appealing version of the afterlife, Lisa encounters many episodes of disfigurement. First, there is a strange incident where she finds a mutilated dog in the ditch. Then, her father's chickens are maimed by hawks. She is with her father when they discover her uncle's body partially eaten by seals and disfigured from being in the ocean. She also hears of her grandfather's body being recovered from an overflowing bathtub.

**Racism:** Ba-ba-oo, who lost his arm fighting a war, did not get compensated from Veterans Affairs because they said Indian Affairs would cover it, and did not get compensated by Indian Affairs because they said Veteran's Affairs would cover it. Residential schools, a mandatory federal policy for Indian children, causes a rift in the family because Trudy believe that Ma-ma-oo chose to send her there. Erica and Lisa are harassed by a carload of white men who threaten them because they are native and no bystanders intervene despite the fact that it happens in broad daylight. Alcan pollutes one of the oolichan rivers, reducing the supply and causing villagers to have to travel farther out of their way to fish oolichan.

**Keeping secrets:** Throughout the novel Lisa keeps secrets of both spiritual and non-spiritual things that happen. Some of them are small, such as her sighting of b'gwus crossing the road, but some of them are big, such as little man. Lisa keeps secrets that belong to others, too, such as the time that she saw Mick kiss Gladys' neck. She shares some secrets with others, such as her ability to see ghosts; some secrets, such as Cheese's sexual assault, are figured out by other characters close to her; and some secrets, such as her death sending from Tab are never revealed to other characters. She is also constantly trying to make sense of others by unravelling the secrets of those around her, such as Mick's relationships and Josh's history as a sexually abused child and sexual predator. Dreams may help unravel secrets, but certainly not in a straightforward way.

**Multiple perspectives on the same story:** This is in part, a storytelling strategy, however, it also reflects worldview. For example, in the first telling of b'gwus Lisa's dad tells a gory version and Ma-ma-oo gets upset that he embellishes it. Ma-ma-oo also tells Lisa that stories used to be raunchier than they are now. The character of Ba-ba-oo highlights how different people can have drastically different versions of the same story.

## Structure

The novel is structured in four chapters. The narrative is told in first person from Lisa's perspective. The main part of the narrative begins with Lisa waking up shortly after finding out that her brother is lost at sea and ends with Lisa at sea looking for her brother. During the present narrative, Lisa reflects on events leading up to her brother's disappearance and significant events in her life. Intertwined with this narrative is a series of frequent and sometimes lengthy flashbacks which illustrate how her brother came to be lost at sea, Lisa's relationship with her brother, and Lisa's relationship with the spirit world. Lisa's flashbacks begin in childhood and end the day that her brother left to sea.

# Chapter by Chapter Summary

## Part One: Love Like the Ocean

*Present day is in italics, memories are in normal font.*

*Lisa hears crows telling her la'es - go down to the bottom of the ocean. Lisa awakes to find her parents in the kitchen. Her brother's boat, Queen of the North, is lost at sea a six hour boat ride away. Lisa dreamt that she saw her brother at Monkey Beach.*

- Lisa remembers her father telling them, as children, stories about B'gwus (sasquatch). Jimmy wanted to take a picture of b'gwus because he saw a tabloid ad offering a reward for a picture of sasquatch. The goes to Monkey Beach. Lisa sees a sasquatch, Jimmy does not, she doesn't tell him.

*Lisa reflects on her dream, knows it isn't a death sending because they happen when you're awake.*

- Lisa remembers a dead dog and the first time she saw him - a "little dark man with bright red hair," before a tidal wave hit the village.

*Lisa smokes on the balcony with her father and wishes she could talk to him about spiritual matters.*

- Lisa remembers seeing the little man and telling her mother, but her mother said it was a nightmare.
- Mick returns from a long, unexplained absence. The children don't recognized him, but everyone else is happy to see him.
- Little man is described in more detail.
- Lisa remembers the tidal wave.
- Lisa remembers her dad buying chickens and hawks attacking the chickens.

*Lisa's parents leave, and Aunt Edith stays with Lisa at the house. Lisa remembers her brother telling her that he took the job on the Queen of the North "to make things right."*

- Lisa remembers a childhood day on the beach with Tab, Erica, and Jimmy. They meet a new girl, Adelaine, who is very beautiful. Lisa ditches Jimmy and her mother tells her that someday she'll miss having him around all the time. Jimmy was a good swimmer but Lisa struggled to learn. When Jimmy got a bike Lisa injured herself learning how to ride before he did.
- Lisa remembers the first time Mick babysat her and Jimmy and how Mick told her about his time in AIM.
- Lisa remembers a funeral feast where Ma-ma-oo and Trudy didn't get along. Ma-ma-oo said that there was something wrong with Josh. Tab tells Lisa that Ma-ma-oo and Trudy



don't get along because Ba-ba-oo was abusive and Ma-ma-oo chose to send Mick and Trudy to residential school instead of kicking Ba-ba-oo out of the house.

- Lisa remembers seeing Mick in an angry rage after Elvis died. Mick then went to Graceland without telling anyone where he was going and was gone for a month.
- Lisa remembers playing with Erica when the town bully Frank, along with Cheese and Pooch, tried to pick on them. Lisa and Frank fought, Lisa won, and both ended up in the ER.
- Lisa remembers Christmas tree hunting with her father and Mick.
- Barry, Cookie's brother, comes to town, and the family discovers that Mick was married to Cookie.
- Lisa and Mick go q'ah'm picking with Mick and they bring some to Ma-ma-oo.
- Lisa and Ma-ma-oo make an offering to Ba-ba-oo on his birthday. Lisa doesn't tel her mom. Ba-ba-oo was a vet who lost an arm but didn't get compensated through Veteran's Affairs because he was an Indian or through Indian Affairs because he was a veteran.
- Tab and Lisa smoke at the graveyard.

*Phone call from Lisa's parents. No news from Jimmy. Lisa goes into Jimmy's room.*

- Lisa remembers going to fishing camp with Mick and seeing ghosts on the way. Mick tells Lisa about her parents' first almost-date. Mick finds a halibut in a crabtrap and Mick says it's a magic thing and lets it go. Mother, Geordie, and Edith meet them at a cabin. Lisa mentions ghosts. Mick asks Gladys if she's ever told Lisa about Ba-ba-oo, Gladys says no, they change the subject. Mick has a nightmare about Cookie. Mick, Gladys, and Lisa decided to go camping at a nearby lake. Gladys tells a story about Stone Man. When they return to camp Geordie and Edith have left for supplies. Mick goes jigging. Lisa leave the cabin without permission and explores an abandoned village. When she comes back she sees Mick put his arms around Gladys' waist and kiss her neck. Gladys removes his arms from her waist. On the way home from the camp Gladys has a vision.
- Lisa further contemplates the gore of the chickens.
- Lisa remembers Jimmy's crow Spotty.
- Lisa remembers visiting Tab's and Aunt Trudy drunkenly telling her that Mick was a drunk back in the day and in love with Gladys. Lisa returns the next day and a hungover Trudy tells her that Mick and Gladys dated but nothing happened because Mick mysteriously disappeared, and Gladys was upset but Albert comforted her, and they've been together since.
- Little man appears, touches Lisa, trying to comfort her.

*Spotty tells Lisa la'sda. Her parents cal to say that the search party has found the empty life raft from Queen of the North. Lisa decided to take an 11 hour journey by speedboat to meet up with her parents. She leaves a note on the table for Aunt Edith.*

## Part Two: The Song of Your Breath

*Lisa is on the boat, passing a graveyard.*

- After Mick's funeral Josh gave Lisa two pictures of Mick and \$100. Barry shares memories of Mick's AIM days with Lisa.
- Trudy gets evicted and Tab announced that they're moving to Vancouver.
- Lisa makes an offering to Mick.
- Lisa, Ma-ma-oo, and Gladys can and smoke fish.
- Ma-ma-oo and Lisa pick oxasuli - "powerful medicine. Very dangerous. It can kill you, do you understand? You have to respect it." Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa. Ma-ma-oo teaches Lisa how to ward off ghosts and Lisa tells Ma-ma-oo about the little man after Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa about cedar spirits that lead medicine men to the best cedars to make canoes out of. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that Lisa's maternal side of the family has a gift of being able to predict the future. Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that the man is an unreliable guide. "Never trust the spirit world too much. They think different than the living." Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa that there's good medicine and bad, and it's "best not to deal with it at all if you don't know what you're doing."
- Lisa goes back to school. Frank is at her school because he's been kicked out of all other schools for fighting. Frank chooses Lisa as a bullying target.
- Lisa sinks into a depression.
- Jimmy takes Lisa for a joyride in their parents' vehicle, then encourages Lisa to drive. When she does they get caught and she doesn't tell their parents that it was Jimmy's idea.
- Ma-ma-oo and Lisa go berry picking and Ma-ma-oo shares a story about her late sister, Mimayus, who fell in love with a man from far away and died in a storm travelling to visit him when she was young.
- Description of a heart

*Lisa regrets not going with her parents. Drinks coffee while boating.*

- Lisa's grades drop. Jimmy keeps working towards his goal of qualifying for the Olympics as a swimmer.
- Frank leaves a dead frog in Lisa's desk. Lisa, angry that Frank killed a frog for a prank, fights Frank in the classroom.
- Lisa talks back to Erica, and Erica responds by pitting her friends against Lisa. In the heat of the moment Lisa reveals an embarrassing fact about Erica and makes her cry. Lisa becomes a social outcast.
- Lisa visits Ma-ma-oo. Lisa cuts her hair in mourning.
- Erica's friend threatens to fight Lisa after school, Lisa punches her out at lunch which endears her to Frank. Frank, Pooch, Cheese, and Lisa begin a friendship.
- Contacting the dead lesson two.
- Lisa invites the boys over for her birthday party, surprising her mother.
- Lisa communicates with Screwy Ruby, and Screwy Ruby tells Lisa that she's a bad girl.
- Further description of a heart.
- Brief Haisla history lesson.

- Ma-ma-oo shares memories of Mick and Albert in their youth.
  - Cheese, Frank, and Pooch share their dreams for the future.
  - Tab returns and Lisa smokes marijuana with her for the first time. Tab says Cheese is a pervert. Tab hitch-hiked up from Vancouver without permission, and when Josh comes to drive her back she says she'd rather hitch-hike back, then is strange when she gets in the truck with him.
  - Ma-ma-oo tells a story of a woman who kills her husband with a paddle to be with his brother.
  - Lisa and Albert go to Overwaite to buy a Christmas tree.
  - Contacting the dead lesson three.
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- Ma-ma-oo and Lisa pick kolu'n.
  - Lisa discovers that Pooch practices voodoo.
  - Lisa tries a contacting the dead spell, then fears that she's accidentally put her brother at harm. She insists he be with her so that she can watch over him, and during this time he meets Adelaine.
  - Alexis goes missing so Pooch, Cheese, Frank, and Lisa try to use the Ouija board to find her. It spells out JOSH BED, and when asked about Alexis spells out WORM MEAT.
  - Frank sends Lisa an unsigned Valentines card which she ignores.
  - Little man shocks Lisa awake.
  - Ma-ma-oo survives a health scare.
  - Pooch falls into a deep sleep after drinking a single can of beer.
  - Frank and Julie become steady partners.
  - Lisa's mom catches her smoking.
  - Cheese asks Lisa out, telling her she can make Frank jealous, Lisa turns him down.
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- Lisa goes to Terrace where she sees Erica being harassed by a car full of white guys. Lisa intervenes and a confrontation escalates till a bystander steps in. The abuse by the white guys is sexual and racist.
  - Trudy, Josh, and Tab are visiting. Josh calls Lisa "little Mick." Little man darted into Lisa's closet in the morning and wouldn't come out till she put her bathrobe on.
  - Trudy tells Lisa to be more careful because priests in residential schools weren't punished for sexually abusing kids, and a car full of white guys wouldn't be punished for sexually assaulting her because society expects natives to be "born sluts."
  - Cheese spikes Lisa's beer at a party and sexually assaults her. Little man appears at Tab's house afterwards and Lisa is angry at him for not doing anything to stop the assault. Spirits in the woods offer to hurt 'him' if Lisa brings them meat. Cheese tells Frank that Lisa had consensual intercourse with him, Frank goes to Lisa to confirm it, when she implicitly denies it he leaves.
  - While sleeping on the beach with Ma-ma-oo Lisa hears footsteps. When she tells Ma-ma-oo, she is told not to be scared of things she doesn't understand.
  - Lisa begins sleepwalking.
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- Pooch tells Lisa that Frank beat up Cheese.
  - Lisa meets with a psychologist with a strange creature attached to her.
  - Lisa's grades continue to slip.
  - At a party, Adelaine resurfaces as Karaoke.
  - M-ma-oo survives a heart attack.
  - Ma-ma-oo begins seeing ghosts of old friends and family.

- Lisa leaves a party to be alone, hears footsteps but ignores them. Meanwhile, Ma-ma-oo dies in a house fire. Ma-ma-oo leaves Lisa over \$200,000.

### Part Three: In Search of the Elusive Sasquatch

- Modernization of Weegit.

*Lisa stops at Monkey Beach, hears whispering and giggling.*

- Lisa remembers visiting Monkey Beach in 1998, “another banner year” [of partying]. Lisa partied through grade ten, gave up on grade eleven, and partied for a year in Vancouver.
- The interest from the money Ma-ma-oo gave her paid for her drugs and alcohol and bought her friends.
- Lisa has a vision where the ghost of Tab tells her that Tab was killed by booze hound rednecks, and that Lisa should “get her act together and go home.”
- Lisa dries out alone in a hotel room, then finds Aunt Trudy. Aunt Trudy says that Tab is alive. Josh takes Trudy and Lisa to a booze can where they run into Frank and Frank ignores Josh. Josh tells Lisa about Cookie’s unnatural and suspicious death. Frank and Lisa briefly talk. A woman makes a joke about priests and sexual abuse. Karaoke asks Josh for money. Josh says she should be home, and offers to take her home. She leaves without him. Lisa finds Frank on her way out of the booze can and he gives her a ride. During the ride he tells her Pooch has committed suicide and that he and Karaoke are on their way up to the funeral. Frank offers Lisa a ride back in the morning and she accepts.
- On the way home Frank reveals to Lisa that he received a death sending from Pooch. Lisa changes the subject. Frank reveals that he always wanted to ask her out, but thought she deserved better.
- While the others sleep Lisa takes a turn driving and sees b`gwus, but doesn’t tell the others.

*Lisa is at Monkey Beach and hears voices offering to help her.*

- Description of b`gwus.
- At Pooch’s funeral Karaoke says they all know why he killed himself and begins saying something about Josh before Frank cuts her off.
- Lisa and Karaoke go to a party and see Cheese who calls Lisa a freak who can see ghosts.
- Jimmy is at the party and he and Karaoke share a moment across the room.
- Jimmy and Lisa talk. Lisa discovers that Jimmy has given up swimming. Jimmy brings Lisa home to see her parents.
- Erica, who has finished high school and had a baby, visits Lisa. Lisa tells Erica that she is going back to school with the goal of ensuring that she does not graduate after Jimmy does. Lisa gets caught up in studying. Jimmy dates many girls, but not Karaoke.

- Frank invites Lisa to Karaoke`s birthday party, Lisa invites Jimmy. At the party Karaoke tells Lisa that Josh thinks Lisa is special because she reminds him of Mickl Karaoke says she`s going to kick his ass one of these days. Jimmy and Karaoke finally make a connection. Lisa has a dream of Ma-ma-oo and a logging road in which Ma-ma-oo tells her to find mimayus. Lisa uses the information to find Jimmy and Karaoke after they have been missing long enough for others to worry.

*The voices at Monkey Beach tell Lisa that they can help her if she gives them meat.*

- Tsonoqua, another mythical figure, is described.
- Karaoke leaves Kitimaat without explanation. Jimmy responds in anger then parties. Lisa takes him to Monkey Beach to dry out. Lisa and Jimmy have a heart to heart.
- Jimmy finds a new dream - opening a crow research center.
- Lisa dreams of Ma-ma-oo`s reaction to Ba-ba-oo`s death.
- Lisa sleepwalks, and Jimmy finds her after Spotty wakes him up.
- Karaoke returns and Jimmy and her return to their romance.
- Jimmy reveals to his family his plan to give Karaoke a promise ring. Jimmy begins to budget for a wedding.

*The voices in the tress offer to help Lisa. She responds that she has no meat but makes an offering of her own blood.*

- Jimmy decides to take a job on a fishing boat with Josh. Lisa tells Karaoke and Karaoke is surprised. Jimmy leaves for the fishing trip and tells Lisa to tell Karaoke that he loves her. Karaoke responds to the news that Jimmy has left by punching another girl out.
- Lisa decides to show Karaoke the ring, and finds a picture in Jimmy`s belongings which explains Josh`s experiences at residential school, Karaoke`s hate for Josh, and the reason for Karaoke`s abrupt and mysterious trip to Vancouver.

*After her blood offering Lisa hears something slither.*

## Part Four: The Land of the Dead

- *Lisa dreams of herself, Mick, and Ba-ba-oo hunting for Christmas trees.*
- *Lisa awakes to the voices asking for more blood, she demands to know where Jimmy is first.*
- *Lisa learns that Jimmy sunk Josh`s boat and killed Josh, then set out to swim to shore.*
- *Lisa tells the voices that`s not what she wanted to know. They demand more blood. Lisa makes her way to the speedboat but it hits her on the head before she can get on.*
- *Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa ``You have a dangerous gift, it`s like okxasuli. Unless you know how to use it, it will kill you.``*
- *Ma-ma-oo tells Lisa to go back. Lisa asks about Jimmy and Ma-ma-oo doesn`t give her any information.*
- *Lisa manages to take a breath before going underwater again.*
- *A vision of Jimmy lifts her to the surface and fades.*
- *Lisa hears singing and sees a bonfire on the shore. Lisa struggles to reach the shore. Ma-ma-oo and Mick encourage her as she struggles towards the shore.*
- *The figures on the shore sing in Haisla, and sing a song that Ma-ma-oo shared with Lisa, which was written by Lisa`s great grandfather when his wife died, and which Ma-ma-oo sang for Mick.*
- *Lisa sees a pale after image of Jimmy telling Lisa to ``tell her.``*
- *Lisa lies on the beach, hears a b`gwus, hears a speedboat.*

## Literary devices

Character foils-several characters provide foils for each other.

Aunt Trudy vs. Aunt Kate

Erica vs. Tab

mimayus vs. Ma-ma-oo

Mick vs. Albert

Allegories – The story is filled with allegories such as the story of Stone Man. The story of the woman who kills her husband with a paddle to be with his brother then returns to the beach to find that her husband has turned into a b'gwus is notable because it reveals the value system of the Haisla in which a wife should not betray her husband, but also alludes to the romantic tension between Mick and Gladys.

Archetype – The story has a few archetypes, such as wise old woman (Ma-ma-oo) and the crazy old witch (Screwy Ruby).

Imagery – The story is full of imagery.

Flashbacks – Flashbacks are used as a key storytelling tool

Foreshadowing – Throughout the story foreshadowing is employed. For example, there is a story in which a woman kills her husband with a paddle, and later Jimmy kills Josh with a paddle. In particular, the theme of drowning or dying at sea is referenced frequently.

Personification – throughout the novel non-human things, such as Spotty the crow and Alexis the cat, are given human characteristics.

## Discussion Questions:

- compare and contrast some of the character who act as foils to each other
- discuss the inter-generational role of residential schools in the lives of youth in the community
- speculate on what happened to Alexis using evidence from the text.
- they say a picture says a thousand words. In a thousand words or less, describe the picture that Lisa found, and its relevance to the story.
- would Lisa's life be different if she had chosen Erica rather than Tab as her best friend during her childhood? Why or why not?
- Speculate what happened to Jimmy.
- is it possible that everyone's version of who Ba-ba-oo is is correct? Explain.
- we are given enough information to suspect that Josh sexually assaulted Karaoke. Do we have any clues that he may have impacted the life of more than one person in the community by abusing them?
- alcohol and drugs play a prominent role in the story. Describe the role drugs and alcohol plays in the lives of different characters.
- contrast the mood of Vancouver with the mood of Kitimaat.
- what do attitudes towards Christmas trees tell us about various characters.
- based on what you know from the text, speculate why Mick left Kitimaat, and why he returned.
- describe how Lisa's relationship with her parents changes as she moves from childhood to adolescence.
- describe how Lisa and Jimmy's relationship changes from childhood to adolescence.
- why didn't Lisa offer a meat offering after Cheese sexually assaulted her?
- why did Lisa offer her own blood as an offering instead of finding a meat offering?
- what is the pattern of the little man's visits?
- is there a relationship between little man's appearance and Lisa's emotional/spiritual well-being?
- after you have read the book and formed conclusions about the ending, revisit Lisa's dreams. Is there any rhyme or reason to them?
- if the psychologists' strange creature feel good, why doesn't Lisa go back to it?
- what is the role of crows in the book?
- why do you think Lisa's mother denies her gift?
- does Jimmy have a gift, or is Spotty an extension of Lisa's gift?
- many of the characters in the book are related to Lisa or Frank. Attempt to draw family trees for Lisa and Frank.
- locate Kitimaat on a map. Locate the three rivers mentioned during oolichan fishing. Locate the site of Jimmy's disappearance. Draw out on the map the author's description of the village's location early in the book. Draw a line for the flight that Lisa's parents took when they were going to help look for Jimmy. Draw a line for the route Lisa planned on taking. Draw a line for the route that Lisa took back from Vancouver while driving with Frank and Karaoke.
- do the lessons on contacting the dead have any relevance to Lisa's eventual experience in contacting Ma-ma-oo and Mick?



# Eden Robinson biography

from mcclelland.com

“I was born on the same day as Edgar Allan Poe and Dolly Parton: January 19. I am absolutely certain that this affects my writing in some way.”

One of Eden Robinson’s biggest literary influences has been Stephen King, whose books she read compulsively between the ages of ten and fourteen, when she started writing her own stories. “I was a bookworm, right from the beginning. When I got bored of classes, I’d skip them and go to the library.” Later, studying creative writing at the University of Victoria, Eden says she flunked in fiction and blossomed in poetry. “My first-year poetry professor was Robin Skelton. He was a bit late for class and showed up wearing a pentagram ring. I thought -hey, cool.”

As a young writer, Eden Robinson shares some literary territory with the likes of Michelle Berry, Michael Turner, Evelyn Lau and Andrew Pyper, none of whom shirks from portraying the bleaker sides of growing up in the seventies and eighties. As a Native Canadian writer, Robinson joins the ranks of novelists Thomas King, Tomson Highway, Richard Wagamese and Lee Maracle, non-fiction author and poet Gregory Scofield, and playwrights Daniel David Moses and Drew Hayden Taylor in describing Native traditions and modern realities with beautiful, honest language and biting black humour.

Robinson grew up with her older brother and younger sister (CBC-TV anchor Carla Robinson) in Haisla territory near Kitamaat Village, surrounded by the forests and mountains of the central coast of British Columbia. They were children of a mixed marriage-her Haisla father met her Heiltsuk mother during a stop in Bella Bella in his fishing days. Kitamaat, a Tsimshian word meaning “people of the falling snow,” (and not to be confused with nearby Kitimat town), is home to seven hundred members of the Haisla nation, with another eight hundred or so living off-reserve.

After earning her B.A., Eden Robinson moved to Vancouver to look for work that would allow her to spend time writing. A late-night writer, she ended up taking “a lot of McJobs” -janitor, mail clerk, napkin ironer. She decided to enter the masters program at the University of British Columbia after having a short story published in its literary magazine PRISM international. *Traplines* was the young woman's first book, a collection of dark and brutal stories that feature a deadpan, gritty humour. While Eden was finishing work on the book, her paternal grandmother died; Eden feels the knowledge of real grief affected her writing. The book was published in 1996 and won the UK’s Winifred Holtby prize.

Eden holed herself up in her Vancouver apartment to write *Monkey Beach*. Though she had written a novella before (*Traplines* is composed of just four stories, one over 100 pages long), Eden had to work hard at the structuring of her first novel. The result is compelling and complex; *The Washington Post* called it “artfully constructed,” the *National Post* deemed it “intricately patterned.” Critics in the US, the UK and Canada were unanimous in their appreciation of the book.

Eden Robinson has become one of Canada’s first female Native writers to gain international attention, making her an important role model. *Monkey Beach* evinces a love of her culture -

Robinson maintains that if you don't grow up on Oolichan grease, you're not going to learn to love it, never mind make it; and if you grow up on supermarket vegetables, you're not going to learn when and where to find salmonberry shoots. She has used her celebrity to draw attention in Time magazine to the Canadian government's chipping away at Native health care, and to the lack of subsidized housing for urban Natives. This limited housing leads to overcrowding on reserves, where there is little access to jobs. Robinson argues that Natives forfeited rights and land for just these types of government services. Eden Robinson has been a Writer-in-Residence at the Whitehorse Public Library, and will be working with the Writers in Electronic Residence program, which links schools across the country with professional writers. She enjoys travelling, and supported herself with travel writing in Europe before the publication of *Monkey Beach*.

## Review of Monkey Beach

from randomhouse.ca

**Monkey Beach** combines both joy and tragedy in a harrowing yet restrained story of grief and survival, and of a family on the edge of heartbreak. In the first English-language novel to be published by a Haisla writer, Eden Robinson offers a rich celebration of life in the Native settlement of Kitamaat, on the coast of British Columbia.

The story grips the reader from the beginning. It is the morning after the narrator's brother has gone missing at sea; the mood is tense in the family house, as speculations remain unspoken. Jimmy is a prospective Olympic swimmer, seventeen years old and on the edge of proposing to his beautiful girlfriend Karaoke. As his elder sister, Lisa, faces possible disaster, she chain-smokes and drifts into thoughts of their lives so far. She recalls the time when she and Jimmy saw the sasquatch, or b'gwus – and this sighting introduces the novel's fascinating undercurrent of characters from the spirit world. These ghostly presences may strike the reader as mysterious or frightening, but they provide Lisa with guidance through a difficult coming of age.

In and out of the emergency room as a child, Lisa is a fighter. Her smart mouth and temper constantly threaten to land her in serious trouble. Those who have the most influence on her are her stubbornly traditional, machete-wielding grandmother, and her wild, passionate, political Uncle Mick, who teaches her to make moose calls. When they empty fishing nets together, she pretends she doesn't feel the jellyfish stinging her young hands – she's Uncle Mick's "little warrior."

We watch Lisa leave her teenage years behind as she waits for news of her younger brother. She reflects on the many rich episodes of their lives – so many of which take place around the water, reminding us of the news she fears, and revealing the menacing power of nature. But Lisa has a special recourse – a "gift" that enables her to see and hear spirits, and ask for their help.

Robinson fills her novel with details of Haisla culture and the rich wildlife surrounding Kitamaat. She uses traditional elements of storytelling – such as dreams, and people's ties to nature – but also demystifies Native beliefs, simultaneously peeling away and intensifying the mystery surrounding spirits. Ancient rituals are shown as part of the reality of a modern Native community, along with Kraft Dinner and TV soaps and the legacy of residential schools. Robinson's previous book of stories, **Traplins**, was remarked upon for being brutally honest, featuring rapists and drunks and drug dealers, psychopaths and sadists – proving to *The New York Times* that "Canadians are as weird and violent as anyone else." **Monkey Beach** is just as honest, but only hints at the darker elements. In the words of the author, "None of the characters are bad. They're just reacting like anyone else to situations of loss and death."