

One Book, One Province 2026

Towards a Prairie Atonement by Trevor Herriot

A Study Guide

General questions:

- Do people of settler descent or recent newcomers to the prairie have any responsibility for the historic wrongs in this region? Why or why not?
- How does the history of settlement and colonization determine our economic and social realities today?
- How has the way we subdivide, own and use land on the prairie played out in our politics, and environmental and social issues?
- What would be a better balance between private interest and public interest to help us address issues of reconciliation, environmental health, and wealth inequality?
- How do Indigenous and Métis models of land governance differ from colonial-settler models?
- Could community interest in the long-term health of the land help protect the natural, cultural and social capital we will need as we face things like climate change and improving our food systems?
- Do people in Saskatchewan have enough understanding of our history to address the injustices faced by Métis and First Nations people here? How do we improve our understanding?
- In July 2024, Manitoba Premier Wab Kinew and Manitoba Métis Federation (MMF) President Chartrand signed an agreement to turn over the 100 acres of the historic Saint Madeleine property to the MMF. Can you think of other ways that communities and governments could make reparations for historic wrongs?

Métis Nationhood and Culture:

- What does Michif elder Norman Fleury have to say about the importance of language in the emergence of the Métis people from fur trade labourers to buffalo hunters to a distinct people on the prairie?
- Norman Fleury says in the book that the people of Ste. Madeleine lived “the old ways?” What does he mean by that and why does that matter in understanding what happened when they were removed by force?

- Agricultural “improvement” and “efficiency” is often used to justify removing traditional people from their land. What are other examples in history?
- Norman Fleury says that the Métis people are survivors. How does the story of Ste. Madeleine illustrate the resilience and survival of the Michif culture?
- How does the Métis resilience help prairie people understand the injustices in our history and the ultimate failure of the colonial project?
- The author suggests that we may want to re-engage with indigenous ways of governing land use to help address our environmental issues degrading the land and rural communities. What might that look like?

Language and Structure

- Atonement is a word that originally meant a kind of reconciliation between God and a man, a coming together as one. How does the author adapt the word for the purpose of this narrative?
- The book is based on one day spent on the site of Ste. Madeleine with Norman Fleury. How does that structure suit the book’s narrative and the author’s goals?
- What does the description of the site, the gravestones, the camping supplies, the surrounding prairie and woods add to a book that is about a historical injustice?
- How does the author transition between those descriptions and the dialogue with Norman Fleury and the long passages recounting the earliest assertion of Métis nationhood and rights during the Pemmican Wars?
- The book is written as first-person narrative non-fiction, with the author present in the story. Is that style suited to the topic or should the author have taken a more objective, scholarly approach?
- What adjectives would you use to describe the overall tone of the book, its language and style?
- The story is set in a cemetery that is the spiritual home for the people of Ste. Madeleine—80 years later they are still burying their loved ones there. What does this say about a sense of belonging and home?
- How can people living on the prairie today connect with the land and its more-than-human presences?