



Commissioner's Book Club: **Becoming a Matriarch**

Discussion guide

Introduction

The prompts and questions that follow are meant to encourage discussion and support reflection. Human rights-related books highlight challenging issues and topics—take care of yourself in the ways that you need while you dig in.

For more suggestions, including different ways to reflect and share, check out [the Book Club How-to resource](#).

Author Bio

Helen Knott is a Dane Zaa, Nehiyaw, Métis, and mixed Euro-descent woman from Prophet River First Nations, and lives in Fort St. John, British Columbia. In 2016 Helen was one of sixteen global change makers featured by the Nobel Women's Initiative for being committed to ending gender-based violence. Helen was selected as a 2019 RBC Taylor Prize Emerging Author. Her debut memoir, *In My Own Moccasins* (University of Regina Press, 2019), was a national bestseller, longlisted for the RBC Taylor Prize, and won the Saskatchewan Book Award for Indigenous Peoples' Publishing.¹

Summary

Becoming a Matriarch by Helen Knott is a deeply personal memoir about healing, grief and stepping into leadership. After losing her mother and grandmother, Helen struggles with loss while also facing the responsibility of becoming a matriarch herself. Knott's storytelling is raw and honest—she shares her journey through memory, story

¹ [Penguin Random House Canada 2025](#)

and commentary, reflecting on family, trauma, and the strength of Indigenous women.

This is a story about the many ties that bind us: to our loved ones, to those who bear responsibility for us and to whom we are responsible; to our ancestors, our cultures and our histories. It illustrates the intersections between our identities, our relationships and the struggle for justice and decolonization, showing readers that human rights are not abstract concepts but rooted in family, culture and history. I found this exploration of matriarchy a powerful anecdote to the individualism that often dominates our public discourse.

-Commissioner Govender

Linking the book to human rights in B.C.

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples and the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act*

The United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP) is an international framework that affirms Indigenous peoples' rights to self-determination, land, culture, and governance. Canada adopted UNDRIP in 2016 and passed the UNDRIP Act in 2021 to align federal laws with its principles. In 2019, British Columbia passed the *Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples Act* (DRIPA). Fully implementing UNDRIP means reshaping laws and policies to recognize Indigenous nations as equal partners, requiring a shift in power and accountability at both federal and provincial levels.

Indigenous Identity is a protected characteristic

British Columbia's *Human Rights Code* protects people from discrimination. In 2021, British Columbia added "Indigenous identity" to the Code, protecting Indigenous people against discrimination. This change is important because Indigenous people have long faced discrimination in jobs, housing, healthcare and other areas.

Discussion guide questions and prompts

Here are some questions to ignite discussion or thought on the connections between the book and human rights. The provided prompts are not the only or complete answers, but some ideas you might want to incorporate into your conversation:

1. Find out what traditional, ancestral and/or treaty lands you live on. Did you learn anything you didn't know before?



2. What role does storytelling play in healing and reclaiming identity in the memoir?
 - Storytelling serves as a therapeutic tool, allowing for the preservation of history and the affirmation of personal and collective identities.
3. In what ways does the memoir address the impact of intergenerational trauma on Indigenous communities?
 - The narrative delves into how historical injustices—such as the legacy of residential schools, tuberculosis hospitals, the 60s scoop, inclusion and exclusion of members based on colonial legislation and more—have affected multiple generations, influencing personal identities and community dynamics.
4. How does Helen Knott's journey in *Becoming a Matriarch* reflect the broader struggle for Indigenous cultural preservation?
 - Knott's personal experiences highlight the resilience required to maintain and honour Indigenous traditions amidst personal and collective challenges.
5. In what ways does Knott's story highlight the gaps between Canadian human rights policies and the lived experiences of Indigenous communities?
 - The memoir reveals discrepancies between policy intentions and on-the-ground realities, emphasizing the need for more effective measures.
6. How does *Becoming a Matriarch* highlight the importance of land and place?
 - The narrative emphasizes the deep connection between identity, culture and ancestral lands, underscoring land rights as fundamental to human rights.
7. How does the memoir explore the intersection of personal healing and community advocacy?
 - Knott demonstrates that personal growth and healing are intrinsically linked to broader efforts in advocating for community rights and systemic change.
8. In what ways does the memoir address the impact of colonialism on Indigenous family structures and roles?
 - Knott discusses how colonial policies have disrupted traditional family dynamics, leading to a reimagining and reclaiming of roles such as the matriarch.
9. How does the memoir address the impact of systemic racism on Indigenous women's roles and rights?
 - Knott sheds light on the compounded challenges Indigenous women face due to intersecting oppressions, calling for intersectional approaches to human rights.
10. What does *Becoming a Matriarch* reveal about the role of Indigenous women in upholding and advancing human rights within their communities?



- The memoir highlights Indigenous women as pivotal figures in championing rights, preserving culture and leading transformative initiatives.

