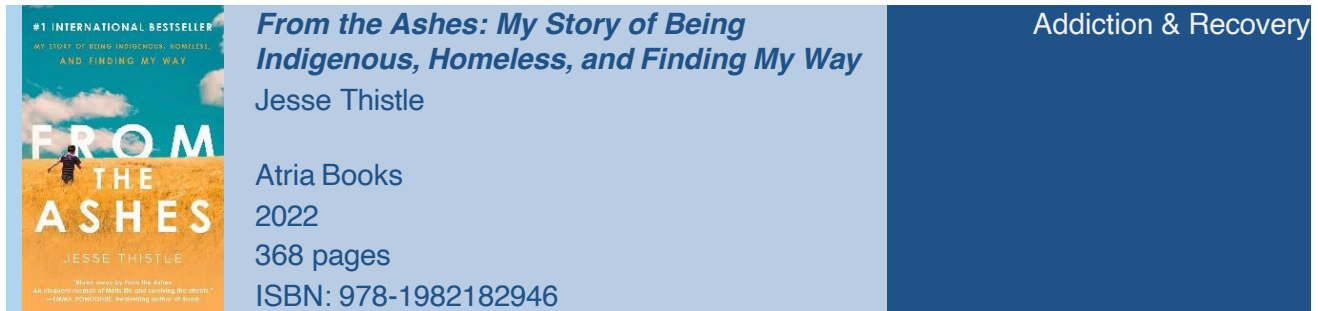


## Discussion Guide



### Summary

Jesse Thistle describes loss and recovery in his memoir, **“From the Ashes: My Story of Being Indigenous, Homeless, and Finding My Way.”** Abandoned as children, Jesse and his two brothers lost all they knew when placed in foster care. The children later joined their paternal grandparents, whose “tough-love” attitude offered little solace. Worse, the ghost of Jesse’s drug-addicted father haunted the family. Jesse began a self-destructive cycle of addiction and petty crime, leading to more than a decade of living on the streets. He realized he would die unless he turned his life around. Through perseverance and newfound love, he regained the warm embrace of his Indigenous culture and family.

### Questions

1. In many ways Jesse’s story is about a search for identity. At the end of the first section, Lost and Alone, Jesse speaks of “the resentments that had taken root” and states: “I felt torn between wanting to be Indian and wanting to hide in my lie [his claim to be Italian]”. Reflect on the ways in which Jesse’s childhood experiences impacted his early sense of his identity and on the key people and events that led him to embrace and become proud of his Metis\* identity. [Note: The Metis are Indigenous people of Canada].
2. In an interview with CBC (Canadian Broadcasting Corporation) radio Jesse comments: “If you look through the book, you’ll see flashes of light every time I was traumatized.” Reflect on some of these “flashes of light” and the impact they had on Jesse.
3. Speaking about homelessness, Jesse states: “The Canadian definition of homelessness is about not having a house to live in. I realized that it was more about a dispossession from something called ‘all my relations’ which is an indigenous world view where everything is interrelated, interconnected.” ([From Street to Scholar](#)). How did you respond to Thistle’s depictions of homelessness? What new insights did you gain? Think about the things which enabled him to move out of homelessness. Will anything you learned make you think or behave differently when you see people living on the streets of your community?

### The

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4. The Metis are often referred to as “[forgotten people](#).” In what ways is this depicted in this memoir? Are there ways in which Jesse is a “forgotten” person? If so, does this change and how?
5. “What was I doing here in jail anyway? Why had I put myself in the midst of this filth, this horrible violence? The answer was simple. I did it to save my leg — and my life.” Reflect on Jesse’s experience of the criminal justice and penal system. What made you sad? Angry? Did you find any hope?
6. Speaking about his experiences, Jesse states, “It [homelessness and criminality] wasn’t because I was just making bad choices. I was traumatized and I was trying my best to survive.” Reflect on some of the specific events that illustrate this. Jesse also claims that “You have to give people a second chance.” How does this memoir illustrate the importance of second chances?
7. Re-read the dedication and reflect on the ways in which this memoir “speaks of the damage colonialism can do to Indigenous people”. Think specifically about residential schools, the 60’s scoop, and broken treaties. How has reading this book impacted your understanding of the need for and the challenges of reconciliation? What actions can we as individuals and communities take?
8. Reflect on experiences of systemic and personal racism depicted in this memoir. How has your reading changed your understanding of racism and its impact on individuals and communities? What can we as individuals and communities do to begin to “dismantle” racism?
9. Reflect on the final words of the book: “. . . the pain in my foot has been a blessing, and I value each and every step I take. Every step is a gift, every one is sacred, and each in its own way, is a prayer for me.”

## The

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