

Discussion Guide



The Scalpel and the Silver Bear: The First Navajo Woman Surgeon Combines Western Medicine and Traditional Healing
Lori Arviso Alvord, M.D. and Elizabeth Cohen Van Pelt

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Women in Medicine

Summary

The Scalpel and the Silver Bear tells of Dr. Alvord's pioneering journey to become a woman surgeon, fighting the odds presented by her own culture and the unspoken rules that made surgery the territory of a privileged class of males. Dr. Alvord teaches us how she merged the latest breakthroughs of science and methodology with the ancient tribal paths to recovery and wellness.

Questions

1. Reflecting on Lori's journey, explore how her unique cultural identity shaped her understanding and practice of medicine. Do you think her personal experiences and background were an advantage or a disadvantage in bridging these two worlds?
2. Considering Lori's belief that everything is interconnected, how have her medical practices evolved to reflect this? How can sound or music manipulate our mind-body connection in the context of health and healing? How might incorporating chanting, as used in Navajo healing ceremonies, be effective in altering the mindset of patients in Western medicine?
3. Consider the potential societal impacts if Navajo healing techniques were to be adopted widely in our Western medical system. What are the potential challenges and benefits that might arise? Identify potential hurdles in implementing such methods and strategize possible solutions.
4. How do Lori's mentors directly and indirectly influence her understanding and application of both Western Medicine and traditional Navajo healing methods? Could she have achieved her integration of Western and Native medicine without their teachings and support?
5. How does Lori reconcile the Navajo belief in not disturbing the natural beauty and harmony of the body with the invasive nature of her career as a surgeon symbolized by the scalpel? How can such conflicting values be negotiated in one's life?
6. How does the issue of cultural competence in medicine manifest in *The Scalpel and the Silver Bear*, and how did Lori strive to address this in her practice? Can the principles she used be generalized to other cultural contexts and healthcare settings?"
7. In interpreting the experiences of Lori and the other characters in the book, how do you think prejudices, power plays, and societal norms may affect the access and delivery of healthcare services?