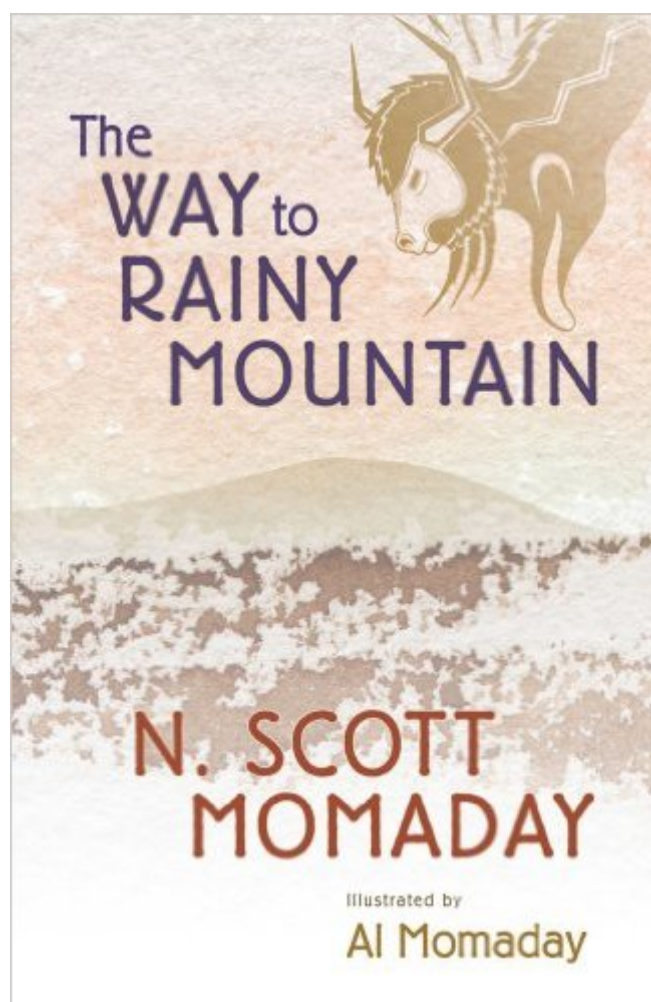


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The Way To Rainy Mountain



Synopsis

First published in paperback by UNM Press in 1976, *The Way to Rainy Mountain* has sold over 200,000 copies. "The paperback edition of *The Way to Rainy Mountain* was first published twenty-five years ago. One should not be surprised, I suppose, that it has remained vital, and immediate, for that is the nature of story. And this is particularly true of the oral tradition, which exists in a dimension of timelessness. I was first told these stories by my father when I was a child. I do not know how long they had existed before I heard them. They seem to proceed from a place of origin as old as the earth. "The stories in *The Way to Rainy Mountain* are told in three voices. The first voice is the voice of my father, the ancestral voice, and the voice of the Kiowa oral tradition. The second is the voice of historical commentary. And the third is that of personal reminiscence, my own voice. There is a turning and returning of myth, history, and memoir throughout, a narrative wheel that is as sacred as language itself."--from the new Preface

Book Information

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Customer Reviews

The Way to Rainy Mountain by N. Scott Momaday; illustrated by Al Momaday. Highly recommended. Rainy Mountain, a "single knoll [that] rises out of the plain in Oklahoma," is an old landmark for the Kiowa people. It is a land of bitter cold, searing heat, summer drought, and "great green and yellow grasshoppers." It is a land of loneliness, where the Kiowa were drawn after a long journey from the northwest through many types of lands. *The Way to Rainy Mountain* is about the

journey-in myth, in drawings by Momaday's father Al, in reminiscences, and in historical snippets. All reveal aspects of Kiowa culture, life, philosophy, outlook, spirituality, and sense of self-the beauty and the desolation, how the introduction of the horse revolutionized Kiowa life, the story of Tai-me, and the richness of the word and the past. It is a literal journey as well; Momaday, in *Yellowstone*, writes, "The Kiowas reckoned their stature by the distance they could see, and they were bent and blind in the wilderness." This is a small gem of a book, beautifully written, illustrated, and designed. It has moments of insight, beauty, and sadness, as the ending of the Sun Dance, telling as the sun is at the heart of the Kiowa's soul-a soul that survives in every word and drawing of *The Way to Rainy Mountain*. Diane L. Schirf, 3 March 2002.

THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN is a fascinating account of the Kiowa spirit's core through the poet N Scott Momaday's three voices: the collective tribal story-telling voice, the historic voice (based on historical documentation), and the poet's own experiential voice (Momaday retraced the migratory route of his ancestors from Montana to Oklahoma). These three voices work on the reader's imagination to produce a fourth voice on the stage of the reader's mind. THE WAY TO RAINY MOUNTAIN depicts an epic journey of the Kiowa people through space (Montana southward) and time (mythological to modern). The ancient Kiowa's psyche fuses with primal nature be it with dog persons, antelope beings, or the mythological (but very real) creature called Taime. Once in Oklahoma the Kiowa mastered the horse and became among the best of hunters on the Great Plains. Brave in spirit, sharing in heart, they became a proud people. But European civilization closed in and all but crushed them by killing off the buffalo, killing herds of horses and turning hunters into farmers. Yet the Kiowa people held their vital contact with the land in today's hectic world: "Once in his life a man ought to concentrate his mind upon the remembered earth, I believe," writes Momaday. "He ought to give himself up to a particular landscape in his experience, to look at it from as many angles as he can, to wonder about it, to dwell upon it. He ought to imagine that he touches it with his hands at every season and listens to the sounds that are made upon it." Momaday helps the reader do just that--gain an appreciation for the multi-dimensional land of North America

Momaday's narrative comprises an elegy for Kiowa culture, drawn from his memories of his grandmother and other family members and from their memories of a culture now lost. And the book ends with a stunning poem, the likes of which one rarely finds in contemporary poetry. It's that closing poem that lifts this humble book into the realm of masterpiece. As Chaucer's Pandarus says,

"Th'ende is every tale's strengthe."

This book is deceptively short: it can be read in about an hour, but you find yourself going back and reading its various passages and thinking about them long afterwards. Momaday tells a story of the Kiowa Indians by tying in three aspects: folklore, actual historical events and his own family history. The book's format underscores this, with the first, folkloric item printed on one page, and the historical and personal reflections in separate paragraphs on the facing page, all set in different fonts. Not meant to be a comprehensive account of the Kiowas, it is rather an attempt to express the author's own feelings and his own view of his heritage. In this he largely succeeds, as he writes poetry in a simple yet powerful prose form. The only shortcoming for me were the illustrations (done by Momaday's father), which seemed to add little to the overall narrative. Otherwise, "The Way to Rainy Mountain" is a very unique and worthwhile book.

In his writing, Momaday creates a vibrant sense of how stories are expressed through living words within vital communities. His brilliant blending of mythology, folktales, oral history, historical descriptions, and personal reflections all connect in a fascinating story about finding one's way in life's journeys. The writing is so vivid and the book is so animated that patient readers will connect with what Momaday presents, provided that they choose to share in the reflective silence that he offers on the way to Rainy Mountain.

The Way to Rainy Mountain is one of those rare books that changed my whole perspective of the world. The beauty of his style and simplicity of his stories show what a firm grasp and love of the language Dr. Momaday has. I had the privilege of hearing Dr. Momaday speak recently. Much to my joy, he speaks much the same way he writes--in clear, simple phrases. He doesn't take language for granted. Instead he cherishes every syllable, every sound. But not only did this book teach me about the language, but about a culture. The way Dr. Momaday views the world, nature, and other people is truly fascinating and insightful. He is a spokesman for a rapidly diminishing world of orators and storytellers. This book will live in the hallowed halls of literature for countless generations.

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