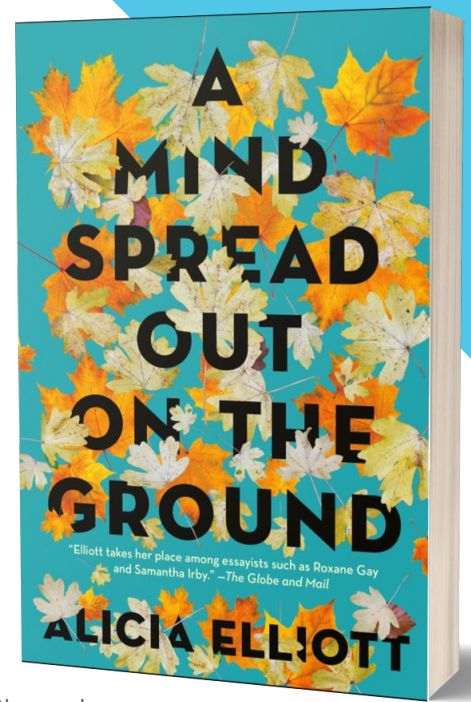


A MIND SPREAD OUT ON THE GROUND

Alicia Elliott

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“Elliott’s intelligence and inquisitive reflection are humbling; her book should be required reading.

—*Booklist*

“In her raw, unflinching memoir ... she tells the impassioned, wrenching story of the mental health crisis within her own family and community ... A searing cry.”

—*New York Times Book Review*

INTRODUCTION

A bold and profound meditation on trauma, legacy, oppression and racism in North America from an award-winning Haudenosaunee writer.

The Mohawk phrase for depression can be roughly translated to “a mind spread out on the ground.” In this urgent and visceral work, Alicia Elliott explores how apt a description that is for the ongoing effects of personal, intergenerational, and colonial traumas she and so many Native people have experienced.

CONVERSATION STARTERS

1. Throughout the book Elliott discusses her mother’s Catholicism and her father’s Mohawk traditions. How have these two cultures shaped her life and worldview? Does she seem to favor one over the other? Does she want to?
2. In “Half Breed” Elliott writes: “When my father talked about the issues our people faced, he uttered a three-word mantra as the solution: decolonizing the mind.” What does that phrase mean? And how does the book suggest we might take part in that process?
3. In “On Seeing and Being Seen,” Elliott explores how her identity shaped her as a reader and writer. What are her thoughts on diversity and representation in literature? Do you think it’s OK for authors to write from very different perspectives than their own lived experience?



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4. In “Dark Matters,” Elliott writes of several cases in which justice was denied to victims of violence against Indigenous people. How does she treat these and other painful subjects throughout the book? What is the effect of her tone?
5. Social problems like gentrification, malnutrition, alcoholism, depression, and poor healthcare outcomes have an outsize impact on Indigenous communities. Why is that? How do these issues intersect with Elliott’s life throughout the book, and how does *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* seek to reverse these trends?
6. White privilege and white passing are recurring themes in the collection. How do they seem to have shaped the author’s experience? How does she connect these concepts to personal responsibility?
7. In “Two Truths and a Lie,” Elliott suggests that the prevalence of reality television is a measure of, or perhaps even a *cause* of, our reduced ability to discern fact from fiction. Do you agree? Does it have to be that way?
8. Throughout the book Elliott draws interesting connections between the personal and the collective: for example how the abuses of our leaders feel much like forms of domestic abuse. What are some other examples she explores? Can you think of any from your own day-to-day experience?
9. The final essay in the collection has a fill-in-the-blank element. Did you participate? How does the invitation to collaborate change the emotional experience of reading an essay?
10. Taken together, the essays paint a moving and complicated portrait of a family in flux. What does *A Mind Spread Out on the Ground* ultimately say about family and who we are in relation to it?



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alicia Elliott's writing has been published in *The Washington Post*, *The Globe and Mail*, *Vice*, and *The Best American Short Stories 2018*, among others. She has been shortlisted for the Hilary Weston Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction. Born in Buffalo, NY and raised between there and Ohio, she now lives in Brantford, Ontario with her husband and child.

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