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## Johnston Public Library Book Discussion Questions

### **We Had a Little Real Estate Problem** by Kliph Nesteroff

#### Summary

Comedy historian Kliph Nesteroff focuses on one of comedy's most significant and little-known stories: how, despite having been denied representation in the entertainment industry, Native Americans have influenced and advanced the art form.

The account begins in the late 1880s, when Native Americans were forced to tour in wild west shows as an alternative to prison. (One modern comedian said it was as if a Guantanamo detainee suddenly had to appear on X-Factor.) This is followed by a detailed look at the life and work of seminal figures such as Cherokee humorist Will Rogers and Charlie Hill, who in the 1970s was the first Native American comedian to appear *The Tonight Show*.

Also profiled are several contemporary comedians, including Jonny Roberts, a social worker from the Red Lake Nation who drives five hours to the closest comedy club to pursue his stand-up dreams; Kiowa-Apache comic Adrienne Chalepah, who formed the touring group the Native Ladies of Comedy; and the 1491s, a sketch troupe whose satire is smashing stereotypes to critical acclaim.

As Ryan Red Corn, the Osage member of the 1491s, says: The American narrative dictates that Indians are supposed to be sad. It's not really true and it's not indicative of the community experience itself. Laughter and joy is very much a part of Native culture.

#### Discussion Questions

1. Discuss your overall thoughts after reading this book. Did you find the material interesting or boring? Was this new information or were you already familiar with the topic?
2. Discuss examples of comedians who helped you see gender, race, or ethnicity in a new light.
3. How can seeing someone like yourself represented in media affect you?
4. Kliph Nesteroff has written about comedy and comedians before and is well known for his knowledge of the history of the genre. Discuss your thoughts about Nesteroff, who is white, writing about the history of indigenous people in comedy. Did Nesteroff do justice to the topic?

5. Of the comedians who were profiled in the book, did you have a favorite?
6. Did you follow up your reading of this book with watching comedy routines by any of the comics mentioned in the book? If so, what were your thoughts about what you watched?
7. Discuss humor in your own culture or heritage. How does it compare with Native American humor?
8. The history of indigenous people in North America is grim. Did you find the subject matter depressing, inspiring, or ....?
9. Are you interested in reading Kliph Nesteroff's other book about the history of comedy, *The Comedians: Drunks, Thieves, Scoundrels, and the History of Comedy*?
10. Compare the experience of reading fiction vs. nonfiction. Do you have a preference for one form over the other? How do the two affect how a writer can tell a story?

