

## DIY DISCUSSION GUIDE

### MAKE YOUR ONE BOOK, ONE COMMUNITY DISCUSSION A BIG SUCCESS

First time leading a book discussion? Have you led book discussions but are looking for some ideas to breathe new life into your group? We have some tips to help make your discussion of *This Tender Land* by William Kent Krueger a success with this Do It Yourself Discussion Guide.

- **Make it fun.** Keep it casual by enjoying food and drinks, even if you discuss virtually.
- **Help newcomers feel comfortable and welcome.** Be sure everyone knows each other's name, and spend a few minutes getting to know one another before discussing the book.
- **Go off-script.** Feel free to skip questions or ask them in a different order based on the members of your group and how you think they'll participate. If your group was really interested in one aspect of the book, feel free to focus on that. Ask your own questions to dive deeper and let other members ask questions, too.
- **Pause.** Be sure to give members time to think and answer before you jump in with your own answer to every question.
- **Be respectful of different opinions, responses and reactions to the book.** Diverse viewpoints make the discussion more interesting and rich.

### A SUMMARY OF *THIS TENDER LAND*

This year's One Book, One Community title is #1 *New York Times* bestseller *This Tender Land* by William Kent Krueger. It's 1932, along the banks of Minnesota's Gilead River. Odie and his brother Albert are orphans confined to the Lincoln Indian Training School, a pitiless place where hundreds of Native American children, forcibly separated from their parents, are sent to be educated. Forced to flee after committing a terrible crime, Odie, Albert, their best friend Mose and a brokenhearted little girl named Emmy steal away in a canoe, journeying into the unknown and searching for a place to call their own. With the feel of a modern classic, *This Tender Land* is an enthralling, big-hearted epic that shows how the magnificent American landscape connects us all, haunts our dreams and makes us whole.

Contact the Fiction desk at (847) 923-3140 to arrange to pick up of a copy of the book, or checkout the [eBook from the Digital Library of Illinois](#), the [eBook from Axis360](#), the [eaudiobook from the Digital Library of Illinois](#) or the [eaudiobook from Hoopla](#) with your Schaumburg Library card.

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

This year's One Book, One Community focuses on the themes of family, home, identity and belief. Some of the following discussion questions are centered around these themes.

1. Although Odie and Albert find themselves in a boarding school for Native American children, most of the Native children don't actually speak in the story. Its primary purpose was to assimilate the Native American children to American culture. Odie and Albert were the only white boys in the school for Indians. Why do you think the author made the two brothers white?
2. The Native character readers get to know best is Mose, and he is mute and communicates only through sign language. Why do you think the author chose silence as a way of depicting the children at the school?
3. *This Tender Land* is a coming of age book that has spirituality as one of its main themes. What did you think about the spiritual path of the book? Trying to understand the nature of God is one of the many struggles for Odie during his experiences in the summer of 1932. "God is a tornado" is what Odie painted on the water tower before they left on their journey. Why did Odie do that? What does it mean? How does Odie's relationship with God change through the journey? Is Odie the only one struggling with this issue?
4. When Odie and Albert attempt to buy boots, the clerk is skeptical that Albert and Odie would be able to afford the \$5 price tag. After Odie lies about getting the money from their father, a second clerk remarks, "If he got a job these days, he's one of the lucky ones." This is Odie and Albert's first experience of life outside of the Lincoln School. What sense of the current state of the world do you get from this encounter?
5. When Odie is working for Jack in his orchard, Jack explains his religious philosophy, saying, "God all penned up under a roof? I don't think so." Where does Jack think God is really to be found? What is it in Odie's experience that makes him disagree with Jack's outlook?
6. After having escaped Jack, the vagabonds encounter a Native American man named Forrest. He appears friendly and shares a meal with them, but he's also aware that there is a \$500 reward for their capture - a huge amount of money at the time. The children are unsure whether to trust him or not. What would you do in their situation?
7. Tent revivals - places where Christians would gather to hear religious leaders speak - were common in the Great Depression, often traveling across the country from town to town. They offered hope to people in desperate times, as Sister Eve does to Odie, Albert, Emmy, and Mose. However, Albert is skeptical of Sister Eve's healings, calling her a con. What do you believe about Sister Eve's ability to heal? What is the con that Albert is warning Odie about?
8. Odie wrestled with God throughout the book. Why does Odie trust Sister Eve and not her partner Sid? What is likable about Sister Eve? How does Odie's judgment of character affect those around him? Do you think he's right to draw the conclusions he does about Sid from their interactions? How do some of Odie's misjudgments lead to disastrous consequences? In your opinion, is what happens to Albert in some way Odie's fault?
9. Do you think Albert changed after he was bitten by a rattlesnake? How did he change?
10. When the vagabonds encounter the skeleton of a Native American boy, Albert says there's nothing they can do, but Mose reacts very differently. Later, he wanders off from the group to learn about the Dakota Conflict of 1862, which resulted in the execution of thirty-eight Sioux and the deaths of hundreds more. How does knowledge of this history change how Mose perceives himself? What impact does hearing this story have on Odie? On you?

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS (CONT.)

11. Hooverilles (named for President Herbert Hoover) were shantytowns that sprang up all across America during the Great Depression for homeless individuals and families. In difficult times like this, how do people like the Schofields survive? Is there an expectation that the government will help them, or do they look to other sources for assistance? Do you think the author did an accurate job in portraying The Great Depression era?
12. The Flats is like no other place the vagabonds have been on their journey. What makes it so unusual? When John Kelly is stopped by a policeman, why does he feel he has to say he is from a different part of town? Despite making a new friend, why is Odie so unhappy during the time he spends there?
13. When Odie is on his own, riding the rails, trying to get to St. Louis, he comes face to face with danger and violence. Do you think he was foolish for striking out alone? How was this encounter different from the things he experienced at Lincoln School?
14. Odie is a born storyteller, even at his young age. Throughout the book he tells Albert, Emmy, and Mose tales about an imp, a princess, and the vagabonds. What purpose do these stories serve in the novel?
15. Sister Eve says to Odie that the only prayer she knows will absolutely be answered is a prayer for forgiveness. What do you think she means by this? Who are the people Odie needs to forgive, and for what reasons?
16. Was Aunt Julia what you expected? What did you think would happen when Odie found her?
17. Odie, Albert, Mose, and Emmy are all searching for peace and a place to call home. What do you think each character is looking for and what are their different definitions of home? In the end, do they all find what they are looking for? If so, how?
18. The author has said that he drew inspiration from the works of Mark Twain, Charles Dickens, and Homer. Do you find elements of works by those authors in *This Tender Land*? Why or why not? Are there other authors whose work this story calls to mind?
19. In the story, Odie speaks of the journey he and the others are on as an odyssey. Do you see echoes of Homer's epic poem in the children's experiences? If so, can you identify Homer's poetic counterpart for each section of the story?
20. What is your response to William Kent Krueger's writing style? Were there sentences, phrases or sections that stood out to you?
21. Share if you listened to the audiobook version of the book. What did you think of the narration?
22. William Kent Krueger is the author of a Mystery series featuring P.I. Cork O'Connor. Have you read any of the books in this series? If so, how did this standalone novel compare to the mysteries Krueger often writes?
23. What will you remember about *This Tender Land*? How did the book affect you as a reader?
24. After reading *This Tender Land*, whom would you recommend this book to?
25. What questions do you have for the author? You can submit online for him to answer at his visit on February 16.

## WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER BIO

Raised in the Cascade Mountains of Oregon, William Kent Krueger briefly attended Stanford University - before being kicked out for radical activities. After that, he logged timber, worked construction, tried his hand at freelance journalism, and eventually ended up researching child development at the University of Minnesota. He's been married for nearly fifty years to a marvelous woman who is a retired attorney. He makes his home in St. Paul, a city he dearly loves.

Krueger writes a mystery series set in the north woods of Minnesota. His protagonist is Cork O'Connor, the former sheriff of Tamarack County and a man of mixed heritage - part Irish and part Ojibwe. His work has received a number of awards, including the Minnesota Book Award, the Loft-McKnight Fiction Award, the Anthony Award, the Barry Award, the Dilys Award, and the Friends of American Writers Prize. His last nine novels were all *New York Times* bestsellers.

*Ordinary Grace*, his stand-alone novel published in 2013, received the Edgar Award, given by the Mystery Writers of America in recognition for the best novel published in that year. The companion novel, *This Tender Land*, was published in September 2019 and spent nearly six months on the *New York Times* bestseller list.

Source: WilliamKentKrueger.com

## ALSO BY WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

[\*Ordinary Grace\*](#) (2013)

[\*The Devil's Bed\*](#) (2003)

### Cork O'Connor Mysteries

1. [\*Iron Lake\*](#) (1998)
2. [\*Boundary Waters\*](#) (1999)
3. [\*Purgatory Ridge\*](#) (2001)
4. [\*Blood Hollow\*](#) (2004)
5. [\*Mercy Falls\*](#) (2005)
6. [\*Copper River\*](#) (2006)
7. [\*Thunder Bay\*](#) (2007)
8. [\*Red Knife\*](#) (2008)
9. [\*Heaven's Keep\*](#) (2009)
10. [\*Vermilion Drift\*](#) (2010)
11. [\*Northwest Angle\*](#) (2011)
12. [\*Trickster's Point\*](#) (2012)
13. [\*Tamarack County\*](#) (2013)
14. [\*Windigo Island\*](#) (2014)
15. [\*Manitou Canyon\*](#) (2016)
16. [\*Sulfur Springs\*](#) (2017)
17. [\*Desolation Mountain\*](#) (2018)
18. [\*Lightning Strike\*](#) (2021)
19. [\*Fox Creek\*](#) (2022)

## RELEVANT WEBSITES

William Kent Krueger Author site:

<https://williamkentkrueger.com/>

National Writer Series Presents: An Evening with William Kent Krueger, Author of *This Tender Land*

<https://youtu.be/WOdRhKYWY9A>

American Booksellers Association - A Q&A With William Kent Krueger, Author of September's #1 Indie Next List Pick

<https://www.bookweb.org/news/qa-william-kent-krueger-author-septembers-1-indie-next-list-pick-573200>

American Indian Boarding Schools Haunt Many – NPR – WBEZ

<https://www.npr.org/2008/05/12/16516865/american-indian-boarding-schools-haunt-many>

## READ ALIKES

*The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead

*The Lincoln Highway* by Amor Towles

*The Round House* by Louise Erdrich

*All the Children are Home* by Patry Francis

*Into the Free* by Julie Cantrell

## GLOSSARY OF TERMS

The four themes that we're exploring for this year's One Book, One Community are family, home, identity and belief. Here's how we're defining those terms:

**Family:** The ties that exist between people united by marriage, blood, adoption or strong connections.

**Home:** Someone's or something's place of origin, or the place where a person feels they belong.

**Identity:** The qualities, beliefs, personality, looks or expressions that make up a person. A psychological identity related to self-image, self-esteem and individuality.

**Belief:** A belief is an idea one accepts as being true or real. Confidence in the truth or existence of something not immediately susceptible to rigorous proof. A religious tenet or tenets; religious creed or faith.