

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Genre Fiction Winner - 20th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

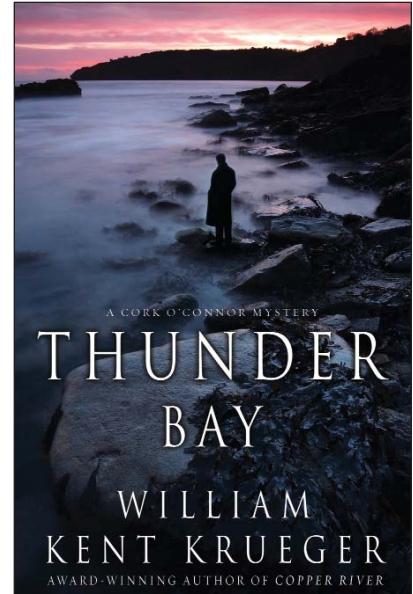
Thunder Bay by William Kent Krueger

Atria Books

Prepared by the Minnesota Book Awards/The Friends of the Saint Paul Public Library.

SUMMARY:

Thunder Bay opens with the protagonist Cork O'Connor happy and content in his hometown of Aurora, Minnesota, after giving up his sheriff's badge to set up shop as a private investigator. However, his newfound state of calm is soon interrupted when Henry Meloux, his spiritual advisor and Ojibwe medicine man, asks Cork to help find the son that Henry fathered years ago. This quest takes Cork to the rocky shores of Thunder Bay where the past and present collide, a father's unconditional love is tested by a son's deeply felt resentment, and Cork finds his life in danger. *Thunder Bay* is the seventh suspense novel in the award-winning Cork O'Connor mystery series.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. What were the biggest unexpected twists in the story?
3. If you have read other Cork O'Connor novels, talk about how the character has developed throughout the series. What do you find most interesting or different about Cork in *Thunder Bay*?
4. Identify the book's various love stories. What similarities exist among these stories?
5. This is the first time the author has written a Cork O'Connor novel in first-person voice. How does this contribute to the telling of the story, and why do you think the author chose first-person voice for this particular novel?
6. What conflicts does Cork experience? Which are resolved by the end of *Thunder Bay*?
7. Describe Cork and Henry's relationship. How have Henry's relationships with non-natives shaped who he is?
8. What are the story's messages about parent-child relationships?
9. What are the elements that make a really good mystery, and to what extent are they used in *Thunder Bay*?
10. Why do you think the author chose Thunder Bay as the main setting for the book? If you've been to Thunder Bay, how well do you relate to the author's portrayal of this part of Canada?
11. If you were to write a mystery, what setting or location would you choose?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER

Q. What inspired you to write *Thunder Bay*?

Four things inspired me to write the book. First of all, I love the title. *Thunder Bay* is so suggestive and evocative. I also knew that my character Henry Meloux, the old Ojibwe medicine man, had a great story in his background that I wanted to tell. With *Thunder Bay* I decided to do something new: write a book using the first-person voice. I also have a recurring mortgage to consider – another reason for writing this book.

Q. What research did you undertake in writing this book?

I spent a good deal of time researching the Ojibwe experience with government schools in the late 1800s and early 1900s. The city of Thunder Bay also got a lot of my research time.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing *Thunder Bay*?

The most difficult challenge was to capture the voice of my protagonist, Cork O'Connor, as he tells the story. It eluded me for a long time. Then, in a rather Pentecostal experience, it seemed to descend naturally into the prose, and I loved what I heard.

Q. What do you hope your readers take away from this book?

This story is, at heart, a tragic tale of star-crossed lovers. It's also about all the sacrifices we make in the name of love. I hope those themes are understood and appreciated by my readers.

Q. How and when did you first decide you wanted to be a writer?

I always wanted to be a writer, probably because I was always a reader and a kid with an overactive imagination. For years I wrote in coffee shops (primarily the St. Clair Broiler), discovering who I am as a writer and honing my skills. It's a discipline I still follow. The magic happens when I sit down, pour myself a cup of coffee, open my notebook, and bend to the work I love.

Q. How do you most enjoy spending your time when you're not writing?

I walk with my wife, play tennis, enjoy my grandchildren, and I'm always touring with two of my favorite authors and fellow members of The Minnesota Crime Wave: Carl Brookins and Ellen Hart.

Q. Has being a 2008 Minnesota Book Award winner opened any interesting doors for you?

The Book Awards furthers recognition of an author's work in a state that cares about literature, and that's always valuable. My publisher likes this honor, too.

ABOUT WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

William Kent Krueger was born in Torrington, Wyoming, the third of four children whose parents convinced them that they had gypsy blood flowing through their veins.

Before he graduated from high school, Krueger had lived in eleven different houses, in eight different cities, in six different states. For more than 20 years Krueger has made his home in Saint Paul with his wife and two children. At age 19 he wanted to be Ernest Hemingway, and read everything both by and about him.

Krueger spends his mornings writing at a neighborhood coffee shop. He has won several awards for his writing, including three previous Minnesota Book Awards. Krueger's other recent books include:

Red Knife, 2009
Copper River, 2007
Mercy Falls, 2005
Blood Hollow, 2004

For additional information about the author and his work, visit www.williamkentkrueger.com.



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