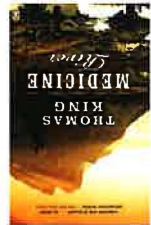


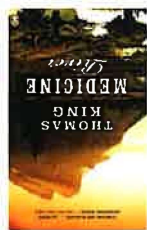
Author Profile for: Thomas King



- Thomas King, novelist, short-story writer, screenwriter, photographer, was born in Roseville, California on April 24, 1943. The son of a Greek mother and a Cherokee father, King failed his first year of university and took a series of jobs that included craps dealer and bank teller.
- In 1964, he worked his way across the Pacific on a steamer and found employment in New Zealand and Australia as a photographer and photojournalist.
- Returning to the US in 1967, King attended Chicago State University, graduating with a Bachelor of Arts Degree in 1970, and a Master of Arts in 1972.
- Following his graduation, he worked as an administrator and teacher at Humboldt State University and the University of Utah (PhD 1986).
- King emigrated to Canada in 1980, accepting a position in Native Studies at the University of Lethbridge, Alberta. It was during this time that he began writing serious fiction. His first novel, *Medicine River* (1990), received considerable critical praise, and was made into a CBC film.
- Often described as one of the finest contemporary native America writers, two of King's books have been nominated for GOVERNOR GENERAL'S AWARDS: a children's book, *A Coyote Columbus Story* (1992), and a novel, *Green Grass, Running Water* (1993). *One Good Story, That One* (1993) is a collection of ten short stories, including his often anthologized "The One about Coyote Going West." A second children's book, *Coyote Sings to the Moon*, appeared in 1998, and his novel *Truth and Bright Water* was published in 1999.
- King spent 1993-94 as story editor for Four Directions, a CBC-TV dramatic series by and about First Nations people. He wrote and starred in the very funny *Dead Dog Cafe*, which aired on CBC Radio from 1997-2000. He has also written a detective novel, *Dreadful Water Shows Up* (2003) under the pseudonym Hartley GoodWeather.

- Critics and reviewers praise Thomas King's funny and poignant portrayal of the challenges facing Native Canadians in the past, and today. His characters are strong in the face of oppression and prejudice, but they are also fallible in endearingly humorous ways.
- King has edited both Native Canadian fiction anthologies, such as *All My Relations* (1990) and *First Voices, First Words* (2001), and collections of critical essays such as *The Native in Literature* (1987). In 2003 King was the first Native Canadian to deliver the Massey Lectures. His presentation, titled *The Truth About Stories: A Native Narrative*, was later published by Anansi press.
- King's latest contribution to Canadian-American literature, *The Inconvenient India: A Curious Account of Native People In North America*, was released in 2012. The semi-historical text was well received and praised for its' poignant, but often humorous look at the history of Indigenous and White relations in Canada and the United States since contact.
- King currently teaches English and Theatre Studies at the University of Guelph in Toronto, Ontario.

(A portion of this biography was reprinted from www.thecanadianencyclopedia.com, 2013)



Medicine River

By Thomas King



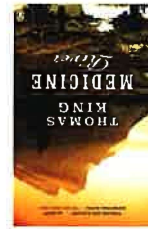
Directions: Each day you will discuss one of the following questions in your journal. Re-write the entire question at the top of each journal entry and mark it off this list once you have completed your entry. The purpose of this activity is for you to make sense of the book's events, themes, and characters as your work your way through the novel. Your entries will be graded on quality, clarity, and effort. A two-sentence answer will not receive the same grade as a two-paragraph answer, so use your best judgment while you are writing.

Journal Writing Prompts

1. In Chapter One, we meet the main characters, Will and Harlen. What is your first impression of their friendship? Do you have any real life examples of this type of friendship?
2. Many readers argue that *Medicine River* presents a very accurate portrayal of First Nations life. Can you make any connections between your life and the events of Chapter Two?
3. Most of the Chapters in this book present two vignettes or mini stories (past and present) related to Will's life. Chapter Three is one of the exceptions to this rule. Why do you think Chapter Three only focuses on Will's present reality? In other words, this is one of the rare Chapters where King does not address Will's current reality by introducing a similar event from his past.
4. Domestic violence is the main theme of Chapter Four. It is the most serious of all chapters, as it deals with a very real and serious issue. Why do you think Thomas King chose to include this topic in what is otherwise considered a very humorous novel?
5. Define *Identity politics* and discuss at least two examples of identity politics found in Chapter Five.
6. Why do you think Will felt the need to lie about his father? He also decides that he will never make his father out to be a "professor" out of respect for Mrs. Morris. Why do you think he made this choice when Mrs. Morris was

- nothing more than a stranger he met briefly on a plane? What does this tell you about his real relationship with his father?
7. How has your opinion of Will and Harlen changed? Can you connect their relationship to your life?
8. Chapter Eight is about miscommunication and Will's relationship issues. We get a sense that Will has been hurt by women in the past, and perhaps he is once again at the losing end of his relationship, this time with Louise. Have you ever experienced the disappointment and uncertainty that Will encounters in this chapter? How did you or would you "break-through" the lines of communication if you were in Will's shoes?
9. Have you ever known a person like Clyde Whiteman? What would you say or do to help a person like Clyde to help himself? Do you think Clyde, a self-saboteur, is a lost cause? Why or why not?
10. One could argue that Harlen and Bertha both have a little "Coyote" or "We-gyet" in them. Research "Tricksters in First Nations Stories" online and use what you learn to identify some of Harlen's and Bertha's Trickster traits.
11. Chapter Eleven is about siblings; we learn more about Will's brother James and meet Harlen's brother Joe. In what ways do Will's and Harlen's sibling rivalries bring the two of them closer together?
12. One of the themes of this chapter in storytelling, not simply the stories told in books, but the stories told about people and events in history. What role does storytelling play in Will's new perception of his father? What role does storytelling play in your life?
13. In this chapter we learn about the many strong and independent women Will has encountered throughout his life. Do you know any "formidable" women? What makes them formidable?
14. Chapter Fourteen is about a sense of belonging. Identify and discuss at least two examples of belonging found in this chapter and at least one example of belonging found in your life.
15. Chapter Fifteen focuses on family. In this chapter we learn that Will has finally found his roots and what "family" really means. What does family mean to Will (compare his immediate family photo with his new found community family photo). What does family mean to you?
16. Like the characters found in this novel, you are "formidable" in your own special way. Proof is found in the strength and commitment it takes to achieve

- your Dogwood Diploma. In your opinion, what else makes you a formidable person?
17. Willis' mother and Louise have a number of things in common, adding truth to the old saying, "children always marry someone like their mother or father." Do you believe this to be true? Have you found that your mother is very similar to your paternal grandmother (your father's mother)? Have you found that you are also looking for a partner who resembles your mother or father?
18. The final chapter of *Medicine River*, although brief, is chock full of conflict resolution. Identify the main conflicts that come full circle in this chapter and discuss how each conflict is resolved.



Medicine River By Thomas King



Student Review Questions

Chapter One

1. Who is the protagonist of this story? What do we know about him?

2. Who is the secondary character of this story? What do we know about him?

3. Based on his letters what is your first impression of Will's father?

4. Explain his mom's response?

5. Discuss the term "Bottle Indian."

6. When Rose takes the boys from Calgary to Medicine River, why can they not

live on the reserve?

7. Why is this especially unfair to Rose as a woman?

Chapter Two

1. When Will switches to another story in each chapter, it is typically a

connection, an association between words or ideas, that makes it seem natural

enough for the shift in thinking to occur in Will's mind. For ONE of those

shifts from the main story line to a flashback in Chapter 2, state the page

number and use a quote to describe what connects the stories.

2. Will's mother said, "Every person born has a talent. . . stuck up there on their

forehead." Who's talents do we learn about in Chapter 2?

3. Granny Pete describes Will's father's talent. Discuss.

4. Who do you think is telling the truth about Billy? Why?

Chapter Three

1. Who is Louise Heavyman? What do we know about her?

2. How does Will end up dating Louise?

3. Why does everyone listen to Harlan and approach Louise to ask her out to lunch? Why does Harlan send them?
4. On Will's first date with Louise, when they go to the movie, what does Louise do that affects Will's stereotypical thinking? Explain.

Chapter Four

1. Identify an effective simile on page 44 in Chapter 4, and explain why you consider it to be effective.

2. What connects the two stories Will talks about in Chapter 4?

3. The subject matter of Chapter 4 changes the whole tone of the novel up to this point. Why do you think King chose to include this storyline?

4. Jake Pretty Weasel is a flat character, meaning he is a minor character that does not undergo substantial growth in the story. Using both January's perception of him and his friend's perceptions of him, write a brief character sketch of him.

5. January shot Jake. Argue for or against this statement using specific examples from the text.

Chapter Five

1. In the Chapter 5 counterpoint storyline about Rose and Erleen, the narrator provides foreshadowing. Identify the foreshadowing (including the page number) and briefly explain how it is effective.
2. Why did Eddie throw a knife at Big John?
3. Compare Harlen's description of the event "two friends . . . trying to kill each other" with the truth of the event.
4. Have you heard of the Bone Game before? What is our local name for it?
5. Discuss Harlen's role in the conflict between Big John and Eddie. Did Harlen help them work it out or not? What does his involvement reveal about Harlen's character?