THOMAS KING

Thomas King, who is of Cherokee and Greek descent, has become one of Canada’s most beloved and critically acclaimed writers. He is an award-winning novelist, short story writer, scriptwriter and photographer.

King’s first novel, Medicine River, won several awards, including the runner-up for the 1991 Commonwealth Writers Prize, and was made into a television movie starring Graham Greene. Green Grass, Running Water, his second novel, was shortlisted for the Governor General’s Award in 1993 and won the Canadian Authors Award for Fiction. A national bestseller, it was also named one of Quill & Quire’s Best Canadian Fiction of the Century.

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Green Grass, Running Water is a multi-faceted story—part myth, part hilariously off-kilter reality—of contemporary Native experience as it merges and crosses the realities of modern North American life.

It is the story of five Blackfoot Indians who live in Blossom, Alberta, or on its nearby reserve. Although they live seemingly separate lives, their existences are connected in ways that are at once coincidental, comical and cosmic. Alberta, a university professor who wants a child but not the trappings of husband and marriage, finds herself involved with not one, but two men, who pull her into their opposing orbits: Charlie the flashy and ambitious big city lawyer, and Lionel, the local TV salesman, self-effacing to the point of near-erasure.

Latisha, Lionel’s sister and guerrilla marketing whiz, runs the Dead Dog Café, a local hangout named for its mythic culinary delights, much to the titillation of gullible tourists. And then there’s Eli, who left Blossom to seek a professorship in Toronto, only to find his destiny in a tiny streamside cabin.

Green Grass, Running Water is a rich tale, weaving subtle, magical humour, revisionist history, muted nostalgia and complex humanity into one bright, whole cloth.

Funny, provocative and illuminating, Green Grass, Running Water involves itself with many of the major questions which face contemporary Native North Americans. It also reminds us of three essential things: the vibrancy of stories, the need for balance, and the transformative capacities of language and people.
QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Discuss examples of the revision of central Judeo-Christian, literary and cultural myths in the novel. What questions do these revisions raise?

2. *Green Grass, Running Water* is a carefully structured novel, revolving around at least three interconnected plot lines. Of these various plots, is there one that is of central importance to the novel? If so, why? If not, how does the structure work?

3. Interesting groups of customers visit Latisha's Dead Dog Café. Of what significance (literary, political, historical, cultural) are the names and characters of these customers?

4. What role does Coyote play in the novel? What does his relationship with the narrator suggest?

5. The four “Old Indians” are intriguing characters, each with at least three different names. Discuss the significance of the various names they are given.

6. How do the actual Native and non-Native influences on the characters in the “Blossom” plot come across in Latisha, Charlie, Eli, Lionel and Alberta?

7. Where does the title phrase “Green Grass, Running Water” come from? What is the irony inherent in this title?

PRAISE FOR
GREEN GRASS, RUNNING WATER

“Impressively ambitious and funny…”
—The New York Times Book Review

“With this brilliant, enduring novel, King has demonstrated an apparently effortless mastery over narrative…”
—The Globe and Mail

“With this clever, vastly entertaining novel, King establishes himself firmly as one of the first rank of contemporary Native American writers—and as a gifted storyteller of universal relevance.”
—Publishers Weekly

“King has established himself as a first-rate comic novelist. At his best, he is as savagely and darkly funny as Twain...King has produced a novel that defies all our expectations about what Native American fiction should be. It's a first-class work of art.”
—Newsweek

“...King is equally at home with his vivid, often comic characters and with the vibrant natural world in which their dramas are played out.”
—People

PRAISE FOR
ONE GOOD STORY, THAT ONE

“There’s a sly, tart intelligence at work in many of these stories...the writing is taut, sharp-edged and very funny.”
—The Globe and Mail

“...all these stories clearly display King’s trademark wit and intelligence, his facility with characterization, and his mastery of narrative art...”
—The Ottawa Citizen

“...written with that apparently effortless control of language and imagery which is the hallmark of King’s best work...King excels as a writer of the border zones between races, cultures and individuals.”
—The Canadian Forum
Thomas King’s *Green Grass, Running Water* is an interrogation into what is real and what is magical. The story, which situates the real alongside with the magic, falls into the category of magic realism: events that seem impossible appear logical in context. King poetically weaves the traditional world of oral Indigenous story telling with the individualised western written text. *Green Grass, Running Water* by Thomas King is a lyrical exploration of the lives of a group of characters living in the small Canadian town of Blossom. Written in 1993, the novel is notable for its portrayal of Native Americans struggling with their identities in the twentieth century. What makes King’s novel unique is the way its structure mirrors its content; all of the Native American characters are grappling with the balance of tradition and modernity.