

AUTHOR BIOGRAPHY



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 currently makes his living as a fulltime author. He’s been married for over 40 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.

- [Author’s website](#)

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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. The Native character whom readers get to know best is Mose, and he is mute and “speaks” only through sign language. Why do you think the author chose silence as a way of depicting the children at the school?
2. Trying to understand the nature of God is one of the many struggles for Odie during his experiences in the summer of 1932. Is Odie the only one struggling with this issue? What sense do you have concerning the way the other vagabonds feel about the nature of God? What about the people they meet on their travels? How does Odie’s relationship with God change over the course of his journey?
3. 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?

4. When Odie is working for Jack in his orchard, Jack explain 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?
5. 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?
6. 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?
7. Why does Odie trust Sister Eve so wholeheartedly, but not her partner, Sid? 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?
8. 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?
9. Hoovervilles (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 survive? Is there an expectation that the government will help them, or do they look to other sources for assistance? How do the residents of this particular Hooverville pull together? How are they driven apart?
10. 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?
11. 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?
12. 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?

13. 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 whom Odie needs to forgive, and for what reasons?
14. 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, and if so how?
15. 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?
16. In the story, Odie speaks of the journey he and the other 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?

- <https://www.litlovers.com/reading-guides/fiction/11647-this-tender-land-krueger?start=3>

BOOK REVIEWS

Booklist

Minnesota, 1932. Twelve-year-old orphan Odie and his 16-year-old brother, Albert, are the only white students at the Lincoln Indian Training School. When Odie accidentally kills a fiendish school employee, he, his brother, their Sioux friend Mose, and a bereft little girl, Emmy, whose single-parent mother has been killed by a tornado, must flee by canoe down the nearby Gilead River. And so their adventure begins, narrated by Odie, who is a born storyteller who often entertains his companions with tales. The way to their planned destination, St. Louis, is a checkered one: a one-eyed, troubled man named Jack holds them captive; a bounty hunter nearly captures them; they find respite with a revival tent show; Odie falls in love; and more. Theirs is more than a simple journey; it is a deeply satisfying odyssey, a quest in search of self and home. Richly imagined and exceptionally well plotted and written, the novel is, most of all, a compelling, often haunting story that will captivate both adult and young adult readers. -- Michael Cart (Reviewed 8/1/2019) (Booklist, vol 115, number 22, p26)

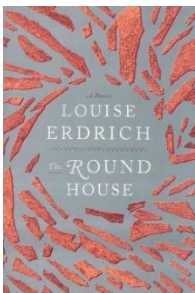
Publisher's Weekly

This lively but heavy-handed adventure from Krueger (*Ordinary Grace*) follows four orphans as they search for safety in Depression-era Minnesota. Storytelling scamp Odysseus "Odie" O'Banion and his more rule-abiding brother Albert are shipped off to the Lincoln Indian Training School after their bootlegger father is murdered. There, along with dozens of Native American children, they endure brutal abuse and neglect; the only bright spot is their friendships with Mose, a teenage Sioux, and Emmy, a precocious girl whose mother, a teacher at the school, is killed by a tornado. After Odie kills the teacher who's been abusing him, the four children escape down the Minnesota River in a canoe, meeting both friends and foes along the way as they try to evade capture, find a home, and hold onto the bond between them. The encounters bring the era to life as the children meet traveling evangelists, Dust Bowl farmers in shanty towns, and ghettoized Jews in the flats of St. Paul. Krueger keeps the twists coming, and the constant threat of danger propels the story at a steady clip. Though overly sentimental prose ("With every turn of the river, we were changing, becoming different people, and for the first time I understood that the journey we were on wasn't about getting to St. Louis") weakens the story's impact, Krueger's enjoyable riff on *The Odyssey* will satisfy fans of American heartland epics. (Sept.) --Staff (Reviewed 07/15/2019) (Publishers Weekly, vol 266, issue 28, p)

Library Journal

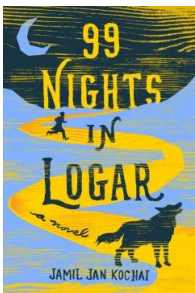
/* Starred Review */ Odie O'Banion remembers 1932, when he was 12 and had one of the great adventures of his life. During the Depression, Odie and his older brother, Albert, were the only white children at the Lincoln Indian Training School. The O'Banions were orphans, while the other children had been taken from their parents to have their native cultures and languages beaten out of them. Mrs. Brickman, "the Black Witch," oversaw the abusive school, and after the tragic death of a protector, Odie and Albert fled, along with two other "vagabonds," taking to the river to escape. There they find kindness and assistance in unexpected places. Krueger's second coming-of-age story is not the sequel to *Ordinary Grace*; it's his version of *Huckleberry Finn* or the *Odyssey*, as adolescents are forced to move toward adulthood. It's a remarkable story of a search for home that also reveals the abusive treatment of Native American children in schools and the wanderings of people during the Depression. VERDICT Readers expecting an actual mystery from crime writer Krueger might be disappointed, but those who want to read about the mystery of life will discover what one of Odie's companions observes. "You tell stories but they're real. There are monsters and they eat the heart of children." [See Prepub Alert, 3/4/19.] --Lesya Holstine (Reviewed 07/01/2019) (Library Journal, vol 144, issue 6, p62)

READALIKES



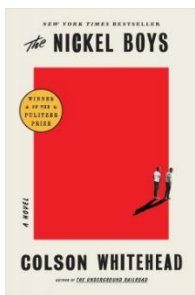
***The Round House* by Louise Erdrich**

When his mother, a tribal enrollment specialist living on a reservation in North Dakota, slips into an abyss of depression after being brutally attacked, fourteen-year-old Joe Coutz sets out with his three friends to find the person that destroyed his family.



***99 Nights in Logar* by Jamil Jan Kochai**

A trepidatious return visit to a family compound in Afghanistan finds a disastrous encounter with a terrifying but beloved guard dog leading to a 12-year-old boy's mythology-laced search through the landscape of contemporary Logar.



***The Nickel Boys* by Colson Whitehead**

In this bravura follow-up to the Pulitzer Prize, and National Book Award-winning #1 New York Times bestseller *The Underground Railroad*, Colson Whitehead brilliantly dramatizes another strand of American history through the story of two boys sentenced to a hellish reform school in Jim Crow-era Florida.