

A Reading and Discussion Guide

Genre Fiction Winner - 19th Annual Minnesota Book Awards

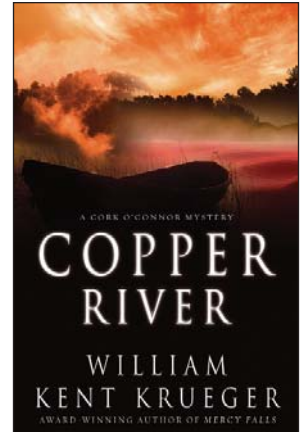
***Copper River* by William Kent Krueger**

Atria Books, 2006

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SUMMARY:

Copper River, William Kent Krueger's sixth novel in the award winning Cork O'Connor series, finds the protagonist running for his life from professional hit men who have already put a bullet through his leg. Desperate, he finds sanctuary outside a small town called Bodine, on the Upper Peninsula of Michigan, in an old resort owned by his cousin, Jewell DuBois. Though Jewell, a bitter widow whose husband may have been killed by cops, keeps Cork at arm's length, her fourteen-year-old son, Ren, is looking for a friend. When the body of a young girl surfaces along the banks of the Copper River and another teenager vanishes, Cork must choose between helping to solve these deadly mysteries and thwarting the hit men who draw closer to him with every hour.



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the book's main themes?
2. Talk about the story's setting. Why do you think the author chose this particular setting?
3. Comment on Ren and Charlie's relationship. What strikes you as typical about this teen relationship, and what, if anything, do you find unusual about it?
4. What is the cougar's purpose in the story, and what does the animal represent?
5. Discuss your understanding of Cork and Dina's relationship. Does anything surprise you about their relationship? Do you expect their relationship to continue beyond *Copper River*?
6. What did you experience as the biggest unexpected twists or developments in the story?
7. If you haven't read *Mercy Falls*, the precursor to *Copper River*, do references to events that took place in the previous book bother you? Do you think your experience reading *Copper River* would be richer if you read *Mercy Falls* first?
8. If you have read other Cork O'Connor novels, talk about your understanding of how the character has developed through the series. What do you find most interesting about Cork in *Copper River*?
9. Is the story effective in getting you to think more about society's abandoned and homeless children?
10. When you think about the elements that make a really good mystery, what are they, and to what extent are they woven into *Copper River*?

A CONVERSATION WITH WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

Q. What inspired you to write *Copper River*?

Copper River is the sixth book in the Cork O'Connor series, but actually the second book in a two-part story, the first part of which is told in my previous novel, *Mercy Falls*. What inspired me to write a two-book story? I loved the idea of the challenge!

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

Copper River is set in the Upper Peninsula (U.P.) of Michigan, so I did a lot of research in the U.P. Also, because a cougar is significant to the plot, I read a good deal about this interesting wild creature. As always, I talked to a lot of cops.

Q. What interesting challenges did you encounter in writing the book?

Because it's the second in a two-part story but still has a story of its own to tell, I was faced with the daunting task of referencing the holdover problems from the first book without slowing the pace of the events in *Copper River*. Also, a couple of teenagers are at the center of the story, and teenagers are always a challenge for me to write about.

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

There is an issue at the heart of *Copper River*: a concern over the children in our society whom we lose track of, turn our backs on, neglect. They're often lost to us forever. I hope readers think about this deeply when they close the book.

Q. What do you like most about *Copper River*?

I love the two kids, Ren and Charlie, around whom the story revolves. They were so much fun to create and spend time with. I also enjoyed using the U.P. as a setting. Because all my other books are set in northern Minnesota, this was a refreshing change of pace.

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

My parents always read to me. As a result, I grew up loving stories and wanting to be one of the

storytellers. Although my first novel wasn't published until I was 48 years old, for 25 years before that I wrote every day, passionately, because I loved the process. I still do. I write in a coffee shop first thing every morning, and again every afternoon. That's my ritual and what it produces feels to me like magic.

ABOUT WILLIAM KENT KRUEGER:

William Kent Krueger was born in Torrington, Wyoming, the third of four children whose parents convinced them they had gypsy blood flowing through their veins. Before he graduated from high school, Krueger 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, Minnesota with his wife and two children. He spends his mornings writing at a neighborhood café. Krueger has won several awards for his writing, and *Copper River* is his eighth published novel. His other recent books include:

Thunder Bay, 2007

Mercy Falls, 2005

Blood Hollow, 2004

The Devil's Bed, 2003

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



Photo by Meghan Calzaretta



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