



## DISCUSSION GUIDE

### Killers of the Flower Moon

**“...is close to impeccable. It's confident, fluid in its dynamics, light on its feet...the crime story it tells is appalling, and stocked with authentic heroes and villains. It will make you cringe at man's inhumanity to man.” ~ Dwight Garner – New York Times**

#### Summary

In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Indian Nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, the Osage rode in chauffeured automobiles, built mansions, and sent their children to study in Europe.

Then, one by one, they began to be killed off. One Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, watched as her family was murdered. Her older sister was shot. Her mother was then slowly poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as more Osage began to die under mysterious circumstances.

In this last remnant of the Wild West—where oilmen like J. P. Getty made their fortunes and where desperadoes such as Al Spencer, “the Phantom Terror,” roamed — virtually anyone who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered. As the death toll surpassed more than twenty-four Osage, the newly created F.B.I. took up the case, in what became one of the organization’s first major homicide investigations.

But the bureau was then notoriously corrupt and initially bungled the case. Eventually the young director, J. Edgar Hoover, turned to a former Texas Ranger named Tom White to try to unravel the mystery. White put together an undercover team, including one of the only Native American agents in the bureau. They infiltrated the region, struggling to adopt the latest modern techniques of detection. Together with the Osage they began to expose one of the most sinister conspiracies in American history.

#### David Grann

- Birth—March 10, 1967
- Where—New York, New York, USA
- Education—B.A., Connecticut College; M.A., Tufts University; M.A., Boston University
- Currently—lives in New York, New York

David Grann is a staff writer at The New Yorker. Grann's first book, *The Lost City of Z*, was a New York Times bestseller and has been translated into more than twenty-five languages. Shortlisted for the Samuel Johnson Prize, England's most prestigious nonfiction award, *The Lost City of Z* was chosen as one of the best books of 2009 by countless newspapers and magazines, including the New York Times,

Washington Post, Entertainment Weekly, Bloomberg, Publisher's Weekly, and Christian Science Monitor. The book was adapted to film in 2016.

At *The New Yorker*, Grann has written about everything from the mysterious death of the world's greatest Sherlock Holmes expert to the hunt for the giant squid, from the perilous maze of water tunnels under New York to a Polish writer who may have left clues to a real murder in his postmodern novel. Grann is also author of a 2010 collection of stories, *The Devil and Sherlock Holmes: Tales of Murder, Madness, and Obsession*.

Grann's stories have also appeared in *The Best American Crime Writing* (2004, 2005, and 2009), *The Best American Sports Writing* (2003 and 2006) and *The Best American Nonrequired Reading* (2009). As a finalist for the Michael Kelly award for the "fearless pursuit and expression of truth," Grann has also written for the *New York Times Magazine*, *The Atlantic*, *Washington Post*, *Boston Globe*, *Wall Street Journal*, *Weekly Standard*, and *New Republic*.

Before joining *The New Yorker* in 2003, Grann was a senior editor at *The New Republic*, and, from 1995 until 1996, the executive editor of the newspaper *The Hill*. He holds master's degrees in international relations from the Fletcher School of Law & Diplomacy as well as in creative writing from Boston University. After graduating from Connecticut College in 1989, he received a Thomas Watson Fellowship and did research in Mexico, where he began his career in journalism.

#### Discussion Questions (Source: LitLovers.com)

1. Trace the "path" by which the Osage Indians eventually landed on the swatch of land in what would become the state of Oklahoma. Talk about their treatment at the hands of the U.S. government and others over the years. What angered or shocked you most?
2. Describe the early days of the Bureau of Investigation, its founding under Theodore Roosevelt, its original purpose, structure and operation, as well as its corruption, ineptness and bungled investigation of the Osage murders.
3. What made young J. Edgar Hoover an unlikely choice to head the Bureau of Investigation? What was his vision for the bureau—why, for instance, a nationalized police force rather than the existing patchwork structure?
4. How would you describe Tom White? Talk about how he approached the investigation into the Osage murders? When he solved the crime, were you surprised by the identity of the mastermind? Or had you figured it out along the way.
5. Grann writes that "history is a merciless judge." What does he mean by that?
6. Talk about the last 70 pages of the book, in which Grann writes about working with current tribal members to uncover an even deeper conspiracy. By the book's end, what were your feelings about the Osage nation, its history, and its people?
7. What is the significance of the book's title?
8. Does this story have relevance to current events? Are there parallels regarding the Standing Rock Lakota nation and the Keystone pipeline?