

# Book Club Discussion Guide

## About the Author



### ***Book Title: Medicine Walk*** **by Richard Wagamese, 1955-2017**

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Richard Wagamese is one of Canada's foremost Native authors and storytellers. Working as a professional writer since 1979 he's been a newspaper columnist and reporter, radio and television broadcaster and producer, documentary producer and the author of thirteen titles from major Canadian publishers.

The 59 year-old Ojibway from the Wabaseemoong First Nation in Northwestern Ontario became the first Native Canadian to win a National Newspaper Award for Column Writing in 1991. As a published author he was won the George Ryga Award for Social Awareness in Literature for his 2011 memoir *One Story, One Song*, the Canadian Authors Association Award for Fiction for his third novel *Dream Wheels* in 2007 and the Alberta Writers Guild Best Novel Award for his debut novel, *Keeper'n Me*, in 1994.

Richard was the 2012 recipient of the National Aboriginal Achievement Award for Media & Communications and the 2013 recipient of the Canada Council on the Arts Molson Prize.

He published an anthology of his newspaper columns, *The Terrible Summer* in 1996 with Warwick Press and his second novel, *A Quality of Light*, in 1997 from Doubleday. A critically acclaimed memoir



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entitled *For Joshua: An Ojibway Father Teaches His Son* arrived in October 2002, *Dream Wheels* in 2006, and the novel *Ragged Company* and his acclaimed and bestselling memoir *One Native Life* in 2008. Richard followed that noteworthy double with a trio of books in 2011 – his memoir *One Story, One Song* in February, his first collection of poetry *Runaway Dreams* in July and *The Next Sure Thing*, a novel in Orca Press' Rapid Reads series, in October.

His novel, *Indian Horse*, arrived in February 2012. It was the Peoples' Choice winner in the national Canada Reads competition. In 2013 he published a new novel; *Him Standing*, for Orca Press and a new literary novel, *Medicine Walk*, with McClelland & Stewart was published in April 2014.

He has twice won the Native American Press Association Award and the National Aboriginal Communications Society Award for his newspaper columns. Currently, his series *One Native Life* runs as a radio commentary and newspaper column in both Canada and the U.S. and was a weekly television commentary on CFJC-TV 7 in Kamloops, BC from 2007 to 2010.

He was honored with Honorary Doctor of Letters degrees from Thompson Rivers University in Kamloops in June 2010 and Lakehead University in Thunder Bay in May 2014. He was the 2011 Harvey Stevenson Southam Guest Lecturer in Writing at the University of Victoria.

Richard Wagamese passed away at the age of 61 on March 10, 2017.

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## About the Book

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A timeless and universal story about family, loss, forgiveness and redemption. A young man journeys with his dying father to lay him to rest. Their walk across the land becomes the opportunity to reclaim a lost history, come to understand each other and ponder the nature of love. Called a 'masterpiece', 'magnificent' and 'powerful' this story will touch your heart and change the way you see the world.



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## Discussion Questions

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1. How did you experience the book?
2. Why the anonymity of the characters at the beginning and again at the end?
3. In the acknowledgements, Richard Wagamese states: "In the Ojibway world you go inward in order to express outward."
4. Franklin seems to accept the role of listener on the journey with his father. Do you think he was committed to hearing everything his father had to say? What do you think Franklin felt about all he learned?
5. Do you think Eldon expected to be forgiven after telling his story? Do you think Franklin forgave him? If not, what do you think Franklin got out of the journey?
6. What allows for forgiveness, in a general sense? Do you think those elements were present with Eldon and the way in which he shared the darkest and lightest parts of his soul?
7. Bucky appears to be a complex character, yet remains mostly unexamined in *Medicine Walk*. Why do you think that is?
8. Is Bucky the epitome of the selflessness of love? Why or why not?
9. Bucky states "Things get busted sometimes. When they happen in the world you can fix 'em most times. But when they happen inside a person they're harder to mend." Do you agree or disagree?
10. Who does the title 'Medicine Walk' apply to?

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11. A review stated "Medicine Walk is a novel about the role of stories in our lives, the stories we tell ourselves about ourselves and those we agree to live by." Do you agree with this statement in general and/or about the novel? Why or why not?
12. Are the characters' actions the result of freedom of choice or destiny/fate?
13. Describe the dynamics between the characters ie. Frank and Eldon, Frank and the old man, Angie and Bunky, Angie and Eldon.
14. Are the main characters dynamic – changing or maturing by the end of the book?
15. What are the significance of Becca and the time spend in her cabin?
16. The plot unfolds slowly with a focus on characters. Was this effective?
17. How does Wagamese draw us into the plot even though one can sense where the story is heading?
18. Do the shifting timelines in the story embellish the plot or make it confusing? How and Why?
19. Is *Medicine Walk* a commentary on the problematic nature of reconciliation on a grander level? Is Wagamese using *Medicine Walk* to explain his experience and feelings surrounding reconciliation in Canada as a whole?
20. Discuss the cultural aspects of the story. What symbols and imagery does the author use to enhance and support Aboriginal culture?
21. Was the outcome of the story redeeming? For who?
22. Does Wagamese draw us into the book intellectually, emotionally or both?



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23. What will you take away (internalize, synthesize) from this book?



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## Reviews

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"A masterpiece, a work of art that explores human interconnectedness with a level of artistry so superb that the personal becomes eternal."  
*National Post*

"Wagamese balances the novel's spiritual and political subtexts with sly humour, sharp, believable dialogue and superb storytelling skills. *Medicine Walk* is a major accomplishment from an author who has become one of Canada's best novelists." *Toronto Star*

"This is very much a novel about the role of stories in our lives, those we tell ourselves about ourselves and those we agree to live by.... *Medicine Walk* is also testament to the redemptive power of love and compassion." *The Globe and Mail*

