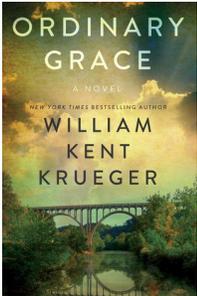


Books by the Stack



Ordinary Grace by William Kent Krueger

Looking back at a tragic event that occurred during his 13th year, a man explores how a complicated web of secrets, adultery and betrayal shattered his Methodist family and their small 1961 Minnesota community.

Why you'll like it: *Coming of age. Character-driven. Haunting. Strong sense of place.*

About the Author: Anthony Award winner William Kent Krueger is a self-described "regional author" -- his loving descriptions of rural Minnesota are there to ground the action of his stories, which are shaped by those beautiful and dangerous surroundings.

Questions for discussion

1. Talk about the characters, starting with Ruth and Nathan Drum, the narrator's mother and father. How would you describe them and, especially, their marriage?
2. What do you think of Emil Brandt and his sister?
3. How would you describe Gus? What is the bond between Gus and Nathan based on? What do you think was the event during the war that the two refer to obliquely as they sit together in the darkened church.
4. Discuss, in particular, Nathan's sermon after Ariel's death? What are its theological implications? Does Nathan answer the question of theodicy: if God is loving and all powerful, why do bad things happen to good people?
5. What prompts Frank, after his father's sermon, to go to Jake and tell him, "You're my best friend in the whole world. You always have been and you always will be"?
6. Why is Ruth so angry with Nathan after Ariel disappears? How would you respond to such a horrific loss: would you respond as Ruth does, in anger? Or would you be more like Nathan?
7. How would you define grace? What, specifically, does "ordinary grace" refer to in the story, and what is the larger religious significance of the term "ordinary grace"? Why is the grace spoken by Jake so

extraordinary...and how does it affect members of his family?

8. Whom did you first suspect...and when did you begin to suspect the real killer? What "red herrings" (false clues) does the author put in the way to lead readers down the wrong path?

9. Much of the book has to do with young Frank's attempt to separate what he thinks he knows from what might (or might not) be the ultimate truth. Have you even been in a position of "knowing" something with certainty...and then learning that your judgment was wrong? How can we guard ourselves against false accusations?

10. What does Warren Redstone mean when he says to Frank, "You've just killed me, white boy"? Why does Frank let Redstone escape? Even Jake tells us...

How could I possibly explain my silence, my complicity in his escape, things I didn't really understand myself? My heart had simply directed me in a way my head couldn't wrap its thinking around....

Was Jake wrong to let Redstone get away? Should he have kept silent?

11. Talk about Karl Brandt and how he dies—an accident...or intentional?

12. What do you think happened to Bobby Cole? Why might the author have left that mystery unresolved?

(Questions by LitLovers.)



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