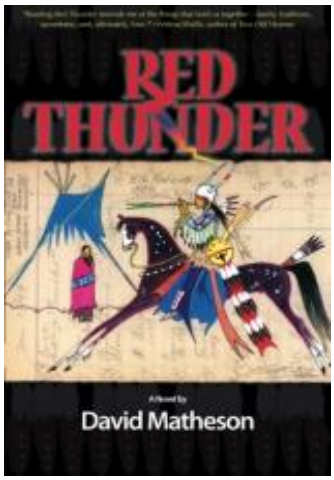
Red Thunder

by David Matheson



About the Book

David Matheson has beautifully rendered the essence of long-standing customs and teachings in his moving novel set amongst the Schi?tsu?umsh Indians, now called the Coeur d?Alene Tribe. Until now, these stories have been guarded secrets among his tribe, partly from fear and partly from a need to protect what traditions they have left.

Matheson feels the time is now right to share his people?s history because it is a story so much of the world yearns for; it is a story of faith, courage, and togetherness. This guide is intended to enhance your group?s reading of this inspiring and enlightening novel of harmony --- man?s harmony with the natural world, as well as his quest for peace and unity of purpose with a Higher Power.

Discussion Guide

For Adult Readers

Red Thunder is steeped in Native American history, cultural traditions and customs, and family and relationship values. The following questions are intended to provide the common ground for a shared reading experi¬ence --- for reading groups, discussion groups, or other topical forums.

1. Red Thunder takes place in the early 1700s, before the Schi?tsu?umsh Tribe?s widespread contact with European settlers. In what ways is Sun Boy?s story a product of the time in which he lives? In what ways are his experiences timeless?

2. In many ways, **Red Thunder** is a spiritual journey. What are the forces that guide Sun Boy and his tribe? How does he view his place in the world?

3. Discuss the Schi?tsu?umsh?s relationship with nature. ?The beauty of na¬ture was more than something good to look at; more than something to get food or shelter from.? What are some of the other benefits of nature that this novel brings to light? In what ways might modern society benefit from their example?

4. Matheson says, ?The backdrop to the story is part of our genuine oral history.? Why do you think he chose to write this history in novel form?

5. Red Thunder follows several generations of a family from birth to adult¬hood, old age, and death. How are these four cycles of life depicted in this story?

6. Discuss the numerous ways in which animals help in the telling of this novel.

7. What roles do the women play in **Red Thunder**? How do they shape Sun Boy?s character?

8. The Schi?tsu?umsh tread very carefully around a woman expecting a child. ?You must not yell around them, argue or tell scary or frightening stories. Never say hurtful or critical things. All this will affect the baby.? Do you think this is mere superstition, or is there merit to their concerns? Why?

9. When Berry Woman is beaten by her husband, Peepa takes her back home. Do you think this is an effective method for dealing with spousal abuse? How effective would this method be if it were used in today?s world?

10. In what ways does Matheson challenge the traditional depictions of Native Americans? Which characters do you find especially surprising?

For Student Readers

This novel was inspired by untold generations of Native American heri¬tage.**Red Thunder** illustrates the importance of passing on family and cul¬tural traditions as well as the life lessons learned through experience and relationships. The following topics and questions are intended to create the opportunity for a shared reading experience and group discussion --- within the classroom, study group, or the family environment.

1. Sun Boy explains the many traditions of his people and their different purposes. In what ways could these traditions help us in today?s world?

2. Sun Boy yearns to become a respected warrior. Why is the warrior such an honored position in Schi?tsu?umsh society? What characteristics define the warrior role in this novel?

3. Animals are a significant part of Native American culture. What are some of the animals mentioned in **Red Thunder**? In what ways do they factor into the telling of this story?

4. ?They were our elders. They sacrificed so very much for us.? Throughout the novel, Sun Boy and Rainbow Girl show great respect for their elders. What lessons did you learn from their relationship with their elders?

5. Matheson says, ?The backdrop to this story is part of our genuine oral history.? His writing style mirrors the classic form of oral storytelling. Why do you think Matheson may have chosen to use this timeless way to tell his story?

Author Bio

David Matheson was born on the Coeur d?Alene Indian Reservation in 1951 at the home of his grandparents, Nick and Margaret Campbell. Since his birth, Matheson has been a member of the Schee-tsu-umsh people, now called the Coeur d?Alene Tribe. His native language is the Salish dialect, which is unique to this tribe, but shares common elements with the languages of other northern plateau tribes including the Spokane, the Flathead, the Okanogan, and the Kalispel.

Matheson has spent a lifetime learning and living the teachings of the Coeur d?Alene. Hunting, root digging, berry picking, and camping are a major part of his and his wife?s regular routine, as are observing the Tribe?s traditions and ceremonial dances and events. He has worked and lived most of his adult life on the reservation, where he has served as a Council leader, the Tribal Chairman, and manager of various tribal operations.

David Matheson is a man who walks adroitly in Indian and Anglo worlds. He has accomplished this by integrating traditional tribal teachings and practices into his successful business career. He is currently the CEO of the Coeur d?Alene Casino & Resort Hotel in Worley, Idaho, which was voted the #1 casino in the Spokesman Reader Review for three consecutive years.

Matheson holds an M.A. in Business Administration from the University of Washington. Over the past twenty years, Matheson has held many esteemed positions and has received many honors for his work in preserving cultural traditions, the native language, and ceremonial practices. He has served as the Deputy Commissioner for Indian Affairs for the U.S. Department of the Interior; the CEO for Coeur d?Alene Development Enterprises; an advisor for the President?s Commission on Reservation Economies; a delegate to the People?s Republic of China?s Native American Trade Mission; and a recipient of Commendation from the Secretary of the Interior for Outstanding Service.

In his spare time, Matheson enjoys training and riding horses, competing in cutting and reining, as well as participating in Native American traditional dances and pow wows. He resides in Northern Idaho with his wife, Jenny. They have six full-grown children.

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