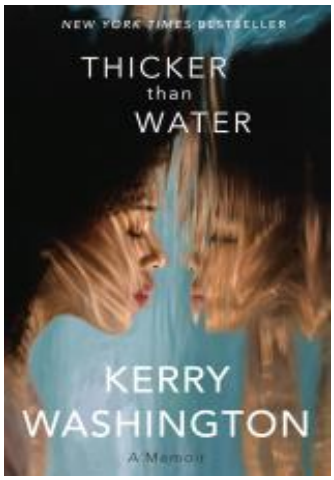
Thicker Than Water: A Memoir

by Kerry Washington



About the Book

In her instant *New York Times* bestselling memoir, award-winning actor, director, producer and activist Kerry Washington shares the "exquisitely moving? journey of her life so far (Isabel Wilkerson) and the bravely intimate story of discovering her truth.

While on a drive in Los Angeles, on a seemingly average afternoon, Kerry Washington received a text message that would send her on a life-changing journey of self-discovery. In an instant, her very identity was torn apart, with everything she thought she knew about herself thrown into question.

In THICKER THAN WATER, Washington gives readers an intimate view into both her public and private worlds --- as a mother, daughter, wife, artist, advocate and trailblazer. Chronicling her upbringing and life?s journey thus far, she reveals how she faced a series of challenges and setbacks, effectively hid childhood traumas, met extraordinary mentors, managed to grow her career, and crossed the threshold into stardom and political advocacy, ultimately discovering her truest self and, with it, a deeper sense of belonging.

Throughout this profoundly moving and beautifully written memoir, Washington attempts to answer the questions so many have struggled with: *Who am I? What is my truest and most authentic self? How do I find a deeper sense of connection and belonging?* With grace and honesty, she inspires readers to search for --- and find --- themselves.

Discussion Guide

1. It?s so easy to create stories, or even have judgments about people we don?t know. What was your impression of me before reading THICKER THAN WATER? Has it changed or shifted as you?ve read it? If so, how?

Deeper Dive:

Have you ever experienced someone holding a judgment about you? If so, what impact did that have on you? Have you ever created a story about someone else? If so, do you think that story limited you or that relationship?

2. How does my relationship with my parents develop throughout the book? What do I desire from each of them throughout my life, and what do they desire from me? How are these desires impacted by the sharing of the revelation?

Deeper Dive:
Sometimes our growth asks us to grieve the fantasy of the relationships we wish we could have with our family, and other times it challenges us to relate to them differently. What type of relationship is available to you currently? What loss or possibility does that put you face to face with?

Context is incredibly valuable. It's not an invitation to make excuses, but it does help things make more sense. Have you ever learned something that created a significant shift in an important relationship?

3. Our family of origin is our initial education for just about everything, from shaping who we are, to what we believe, to how we interact with ourselves and others. In Chapter 1 (?United?), I discuss some of the traits and ambitions I picked up from my parents --- including the desire to be able to manage tough challenges on my own. How do you think your family might have influenced your idea of independence?

Deeper Dive:
Without question, adaptation, a strong work ethic and independence can be beautiful and celebrated, but it?s important for you to consider your motivation. Sometimes, those qualities come from a survival instinct --- your need to protect yourself from being let down, disappointed, or crushed when you place faith in someone and they don?t follow through. Do you have an origin wound from relying on another person, having a need go unmet, moving through hard moments together, or from trust being broken, that has led you to a place of doing it all on your own?

4. I introduce my love of water in Chapter 2 (?Fish?) and reveal that ?being in water, moving through water, has always felt more natural to me than walking on land.? Reflect on the presence of water in this memoir. What role does it play at different points in my life? What is your relationship with water?

Deeper Dive:
Where do you feel most peaceful? And how do you know? Without overthinking it, try to answer these prompts:

Growing up, the ways I tried to create peace for myself or others was by?.
The ways I tried to avoid chaos were by?
The chaos in my life right now is?
What?s familiar about that is?
The ways I contribute to the chaos are by?
What would need to shift for me to experience peace is?
Acknowledging this feels?
5. In Chapter 4 (?Frozen?), I reflect on how I used acting as a way to step outside of myself. Have you ever used a job or a hobby to escape from something --- some part of your life or part of yourself?

Deeper Dive:

From what were you trying to escape? And in what ways are you still trying to escape in your life today? Without overthinking it, try to answer these prompts:

The thing I tried to avoid the most growing up was?
I avoided it by?
What I really needed was?
The part of myself or my life I reject or avoid today is?
What I'm afraid of is?
Naming that feels...

6. Throughout the memoir, I struggle with authenticity and living in truth, often believing that the truth puts love and peace at risk. What does living in truth mean to you? How do you find --- and maintain --- truth in your life, despite possible consequences?

Deeper Dive:
For so many of us, we learn that we have to trade our authenticity for attachment, love, connection, peace, presence and so forth. When we talk about putting peace at risk, it?s important to recognize the difference between an external peace (outside of you) and an internal peace. In what relationships or areas of your life do you trade your authenticity and truth for an external peace? What do you believe would happen if you honored an internal peace instead?

7. In Chapter 5 (?Agency?), I am exposed to a new tier of wealth and access at The Spence School, an all-girls private school in Manhattan. What impact do you think this had on me as a teenager? In what ways do you think this exposure was an asset? In what ways was it a challenge?

Deeper Dive:
Differences can put our sense of belonging into question. The balance of being our authentic selves, while also feeling a part of something bigger than ourselves, can be hard to achieve for many reasons. In what ways did you try to fit in growing up? What did you have to sacrifice in order to achieve that? In what ways do you continue to sacrifice a part of yourself for the illusion of belonging?

8. In Chapter 5 (?Agency?), I discover my love of using art and performance for representation and social change. Think of a piece of art --- an image, performance or song --- that has had an impact on you. How did it make you feel? Did it change your perspective or understanding of the world?

Deeper Dive:
Are there creative ways that allow you to feel most expressed? Sometimes when we feel stuck, using alternative methods to feel and communicate can help move and shift something. Acknowledge an area of your life where you feel stuck and try something new --- draw, paint, sing, hum, dance your way through --- and notice if anything new presents.

9. In Chapter 7 (?An Education?), I reflect on my use of performance both in and outside of my acting career: ?Performance had become not only my greatest passion but also my way of navigating through life, being who I thought I had to be or who others wanted me to be.? Have you ever felt compelled to perform a certain role that was inauthentic to you?

Deeper Dive:

This is common if you learned that your performance, perfection, ability to please or keep the peace got you the outcomes you wanted growing up. What do you believe a ?successful performance? is protecting you from? If you stopped performing, what do you believe would change?

10. In Chapter 8 (?Monsoon Season?), yoga becomes a gateway to becoming more present in my body emotionally and physically. For the first time, I allowed for stillness to have a space within me. What are some activities or practices that make you feel safe and connected to your true self?

Deeper Dive:
There is something incredibly healing that happens when we find value in stillness and presence instead of just in the doing, the output, what we generate for the outside world. What do you value about yourself or your life that has nothing to do with performance or doing? Can you spend more time here?

11. In Chapter 10 (?Black Famous?), I discuss Jamie Foxx?s mentorship and the impact he had on my career. Think about a mentor from your own life. How did they make a difference in your life or career?

Deeper Dive:
To be cared for, led, encouraged, challenged and deeply seen is a profound experience. Do you allow yourself to ask for help and support? If not, what keeps you from doing so? Is there something uncomfortable about receiving care, encouragement and direction from another? What qualities do you associate with asking for/receiving help?

12. As I was growing my own family, another chosen family in "Scandal" also began to expand. We were a community of people who were on a rocket ship together, leaning on one another through this shared experience that we couldn?t quite translate to those who weren?t a part of it. Where outside of your family of origin have you felt this deep sense of connection and shared vision that only those who are a part of it truly understand?

Deeper Dive:
With whom do you feel most seen, heard and understood? Notice what sets these relationships apart from others. If you stopped hiding a part of yourself, what would be revealed?

13. Reflect on my reaction to the news I learn about in Chapter 13 (?Revelation?). How did I process this news? Have you ever learned anything about yourself that changed your view on your own life?

Deeper Dive:
Secrets being revealed, truths coming forward, questions being answered honestly can sometimes shake us to our core. When that happens, our lives can both change drastically and in some ways not change at all. Are there times in your life (or currently) where you disconnected from an inner truth or your intuition to maintain an external peace? What did/does the avoidance serve?

14. In Chapter 14 (?Cues?), I share my belief that ?These characters, these projects, had chosen me just as my children had,? to teach me lessons I needed to learn. I note that "some lessons are clear in the moment and others only become evident long after the fact." When has this been true in your own life? What are some lessons that you've learned long after an experience or a challenging time in your life?

Deeper Dive:
Sometimes we need time, growth and healing in order to be able to see something differently. What lesson did you have to learn and accept in order to be able to receive the information or gift that was trying to make its way to you? Is there a pattern in your life today that is asking for your attention?

Author Bio

Kerry Washington is an Emmy-winning, SAG and Golden Globe-nominated actor, director, producer and organizer. A native of The Bronx, New York, Washington is a versatile and fearless multi-hyphenate, and has received high acclaim for her work in film, television, theater, digital media, advocacy and beyond. Washington received widespread public recognition for her role as Olivia Pope on the hit ABC drama "Scandal," breaking barriers as the first Black woman since 1974 to headline a network TV drama. Washington?s film credits include *Django Unchained*, *Ray*, *The Last King of Scotland*, *Save the Last Dance*, *Our Song* and *The School for Good and Evil*, among many others. In 2016, she launched her production company, Simpson Street.

A lifelong advocate and activist, Washington is dedicated to using her voice to fight for justice. Washington has been honored as one of *Time* magazine?s 2022 Women of the Year, in addition to appearing on the magazine?s Most Influential People list in 2014. She also received the 2013 NAACP President?s Award, the 2015 GLAAD Media Vanguard Award, and the 2016 ACLU Bill of Rights Award. In 2022, Washington partnered with LAUSD and others to launch The Roybal School of Film and Television Production, a magnet school aiming to drive transformational change across the entertainment industry for students from underserved communities.

Critical Praise

?An exquisitely moving story of grace and wisdom, Kerry Washington takes us along her hard-won transformation from a sheltered young girl growing up in the Bronx, to a brilliant actor who would portray one of the most iconic roles in television. And all the while, she shines a light on the acting world, the traumas and triumphs of womanhood and the true, full meaning of family. A gift and a revelation.?

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