

Winterkill

The Author

Craig Lesley is a lifelong resident of the Pacific Northwest. Born in The Dalles, Ore., Lesley grew up in Eastern Oregon, living in such towns as Pendleton, Madras and Hermiston. The son of a woman who worked for both the Umatilla and Warm Springs tribes, Lesley is familiar not just with the territory but the people who live there. He now lives in Portland, Oregon, with his wife and two daughters. He graduated from Whitman College, where he also received a Doctorate of Human Letters. He received an M.A. in English from the University of Kansas and an M.F.A. from the University of Massachusetts at Amherst. He has spent much of his life exploring the outdoors, including an eight-year stint with the Deschutes River Guide Service in Oregon. He is the author of three previous novels, including *Winterkill*, forthcoming in trade paperback from Picador USA.

Recently retired from his English teaching job at Clackamas Community College, Lesley has been noted for his writings about Native Americans. But don't be confused: His novels are not what have been referred to as his "Native American writings."

But he isn't Native American himself. He's just a talented writer who is intrigued by both by the people and place he grew up with.

Lesley says:

"I think the most exciting thing about it is how many high schools and colleges still teach it, (*Winterkill*) so I think it's held up well over the years. I think it's one of the first novels, of my generation, to raise people's awareness of Native American situations in the Pacific Northwest."

"I was always fascinated by the small towns and the country, the kinds of people who inhabit that country and the codes that they live by. In *Winterkill* I was trying to create a sense of the country and the people and the codes all at once."

The Work

Danny Kachiah is a Native American fighting not to become a casualty. His father, Red Shirt, is dead, his wife Loxie has left him, and his career as a rodeo cowboy is flagging. But when Loxie dies in a car wreck, leaving him with his son, Jack, whom he hardly knows, Danny uses the magnificent stories of Red Shirt to guide him toward true fatherhood. From the two-time winner of the Pacific Northwest Booksellers Association Award.

Critical Questions

1. What does this novel seem to suggest or say about America?
2. What are some of the major themes of the book?

3. Do you think the narrative is overly burdened by the tendency of Lesley to inform rather than simply writing?
4. Does the book have a political agenda? How does this affect its impact?
5. Does the book present stereotypical views of Indians or does it move beyond stereotypes? How?
6. Discuss the importance of dreams and visions in the book.
7. In what ways is the book a journey story?
8. What does this novel suggest about fathers and sons?
9. What is the most vivid scene in the book?
10. Will Danny be able to break the cycle?
11. What are the most significant moments of the last hunt?