

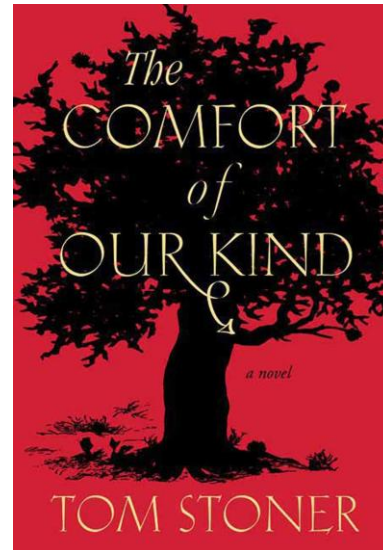
# READING GROUP GUIDE

## The Comfort of Our Kind

By Tom Stoner

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### About this Guide

The following author biography and list of questions about *The Comfort of Our Kind* are intended as resources to aid individual readers and book groups who would like to learn more about the author and this book. We hope that this guide will provide you a starting place for discussion, and suggest a variety of perspectives from which you might approach *The Comfort of Our Kind*.

### About the Book

Situated between two mountain ridges, the New England town of Franklin Notch celebrates its history and the characters who have forged it. The cornerstone of its heritage is Talbert's Treaty, an eighteenth-century agreement between the original settlers and the Sagaweh Indian nation---as discovered by local historian Wes Moffatt, ex-host of a regionally famous kiddie TV show. *The Comfort of Our Kind* is narrated by Daniel "Boone" Moffatt, Wes's oldest son and local chief of police, who describes life with his sister, Veronica, a misanthropic nurse with a weakness for Xanax; his brother, Reggie, a disgraced sportscaster who has been living undetected in Cinderella's Castle; his mother, a mystic ex-nun (who everyone still calls "Sister"); and his father, who has just been accused of inventing bad history by concocting Talbert's Treaty and most of the local lore.

As children, Boone, Veronica, and Reggie were trained by their mother's puzzling bedtime stories to serve in God's Army of Saints and "fight for Goodness on earth." Now, as adults, they search for their gifts of Faith, Hope, and Grace in a parade of life-altering adventures while struggling with the presence of evil in the world. Along the way, they collide with a collection of characters, including a serial killer, a Zenlike naturalist doctor, a genius Mafia princess, phony Native Americans, and the Devil himself in various incarnations of human vanity. Against the deadline of Wes and Sister's fiftieth wedding anniversary and Boone's apocalyptic seventh visit



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from the Devil, the Moffatt family struggles to unite as a force of goodness and to reclaim the respect of their neighbors and friends.

Reminiscent of *Lake Wobegon Days* and *The Witches of Eastwick*, *The Comfort of Our Kind* is an unpredictable, quirky tale in which each character's spirituality is tested in the overlay between earthy mysticism and raucous fantasy.

## About the Author

Tom Stoner's work has appeared in *Cutbank*, *The Bitter Oleander Press*, *Another Chicago Magazine*, and other publications. Recently, he was nominated for the 2005 Pushcart Prize for his short story "Make Ugly Pretty."

## Discussion Questions

1. Is Earth part of the spirit world? Can anyone have visions?
2. Is evil an internal or external force? Does evil exist beyond man's perception of his own existence?
3. Is life a test for something else? Does free will include choice of destiny?
4. Should men make bargains with God? How would you feel if someone made a bargain with God, using your soul as the prize?
5. What is Boone Moffatt's tragic flaw? Does the story effectively resolve his crisis of spirit?
6. What is an axis mundi? In "The Comfort of Our Kind," what are the various ways the axis mundi is represented symbolically, and to what effect?
7. Are people born with spiritual gifts, or are they an acquired product of our upbringing and sense of cultural decency? Does every person have at least one spiritual gift to develop?
8. As it relates to the story, what is the meaning of the phrase "The Comfort of Our Kind"? Do you see it as a lasting condition for the Moffatts? How do you see the characters behaving in five years?
9. In your reading of the book, was there anything that invited you to see things differently?

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