

# The Truth about Stories (CBC Massey Lectures)

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## Winner of the 2003 Trillium Book Award

"Stories are wondrous things," award-winning author and scholar Thomas King declares in his 2003 CBC Massey Lectures. "And they are dangerous."

Beginning with a traditional Native oral story, King weaves his way through literature and history, religion and politics, popular culture and social protest, gracefully elucidating North America's relationship with its Native peoples.

Native culture has deep ties to storytelling, and yet no other North American culture has been the subject of more erroneous stories. The Indian of fact, as King says, bears little resemblance to the literary Indian, the dying Indian, the construct so powerfully and often destructively projected by White North America. With keen perception and wit, King illustrates that stories are the key to, and only hope for, human understanding. He compels us to listen well.

"Stories are wondrous things. And they are dangerous." In *The Truth About Stories*, Native novelist and scholar Thomas King explores how stories shape who we are and how we understand and interact with other people. From creation stories to personal experiences, historical anecdotes to social injustices, racist propaganda to works of contemporary Native literature, King probes Native culture's deep ties to storytelling. With wry humor, King deftly weaves events from his own life as a child in California, an academic in Canada, and a Native North American with a wide-ranging discussion of stories told by and about Indians. So many stories have been told about Indians, King comments, that "there is no reason for the Indian to be real. The Indian simply has to exist in our imaginations." That imaginative Indian that North Americans hold dear has been challenged by Native writers - N. Scott Momaday, Leslie Marmon Silko, Louis Owens, Robert Alexie, and others - who provide alternative narratives of the Native experience that question, create a present, and imagine a future. King reminds the reader, Native and non-Native, that storytelling carries with it social and moral responsibilities. "Don't say in the years to come that you would have lived your life differently if only you had heard this story. You've heard it now." Illuminates the relationship between storytelling and the Native North American experience.

### Other Books

*When the Spirit Calls*. In January 1832, in the most southern part of Ontario's James Bay, an elderly Cree man by the name of Quapakay was told by the spirits of the shaking tent that in order to survive the winter, he was required to "spoil" the post at Hannah Bay, a Hudson's Bay Company goose hunting station. Following the directions of the spirits, Quapakay and his sons carried out this ill-fated task, resulting in the deaths of sixteen occupants of the Hannah Bay post. Now known as the "Hannah Bay Massacre," the victims included fur trader William Corrigan, the postmaster and his wife, and seven other

Indigenous people. When the Spirit Calls explores the social, cultural, and historical context in which the Hannah Bay tragedy took place, as gleaned from the Hudson Bay Company's archival records and elucidations by Cree oral traditions. The research is the culmination of over forty years of investigation by Edward J. Hedin in Indigenous communities, from the mid-1970s to the present day. In the book, Hedin aims to uncover the circumstances, behaviours, and attitudes that led to the slaughter. When the Spirit Calls sheds light on the racist attitudes held by the white settler population towards Indigenous people - attitudes that were prevalent in our colonial past and that continue to this very day.

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