**Killers of the Flower Moon**

**By David Grann**

**About the Book**

In the 1920s, the richest people per capita in the world were members of the Osage Indian nation in Oklahoma. After oil was discovered beneath their land, they rode in chauffeured automobiles, built mansions, and sent their children to study in Europe.

Then, one by one, the Osage began to be killed off. The family of an Osage woman, Mollie Burkhart, became a prime target. Her relatives were shot and poisoned. And it was just the beginning, as more and more members of the tribe began to die under mysterious circumstances.

In this last remnant of the Wild West—where oilmen like J. P. Getty made their fortunes and where desperadoes like Al Spencer, the “Phantom Terror,” roamed—many of those who dared to investigate the killings were themselves murdered. As the death toll climbed to more than twenty-four, the FBI took up the case. It was one of the organization’s first major homicide investigations and the bureau badly bungled the case. In desperation, the young director, J. Edgar Hoover, turned to a former Texas Ranger named Tom White to unravel the mystery. White put together an undercover team, including one of the only American Indian agents in the bureau. The agents infiltrated the region, struggling to adopt the latest techniques of detection. Together with the Osage they began to expose one of the most chilling conspiracies in American history.

**About the Author**:

DAVID GRANN is a #1 New York Times bestselling author and a staff writer at The New Yorker magazine. He is the author of "The Lost City of Z" and a National Book Award finalist for "Killers of the Flower Moon," both of which were chosen as one of the best books of their respective years by The New York Times, The Washington Post, and other publications. He is also the author of "The Devil and Sherlock Holmes: Tales of Murder, Madness, and Obsession" and "Old Man and the Gun: And other Tales of True Crime." Several of his stories, including "The Lost City of Z" and "Old Man and the Gun," have been adapted into major motion pictures. And his work has garnered several honors for outstanding nonfiction, including a George Polk Award, an Edgar Award, and a Spur Award.

**If you enjoyed this book*:***

* The Kentucky Cannibal by Ryan Green
* I, A Squealer by Richard Bruns
* The Texas Tower Sniper by Ryan Green
* McVeigh by Ben Fenwick
* The Color of Law by Richard Rothstein

**Discussion Questions**

1. Before starting “Killers of the Flower Moon,” had you ever heard of the Osage murders? If so, how did you learn about them, and what did you know?

2. How did the Osage come to be so wealthy? What tactics did the government employ to inhibit the Osage from freely using their money? Grann describes the discovery of oil on Osage land as a “cursed blessing.” Do you think it was more of a curse or a blessing?

3. The subtitle is “The Osage Murders and the Birth of the FBI” – obviously they are intertwined, but are these topics given equal weight?

4. The first character we meet is Mollie Burkhart, whose family becomes a main target of the Osage murders. How does Grann signal to us early on what the murderer may be after?

5. How trustworthy do you find the different authorities that appear throughout the book to investigate the murders? Authorities such as William Hale, who Grann initially describes as a “powerful local advocate for law and order,” as well as the frontier lawmen, the brothers who conduct autopsies of the bodies, the local sheriff and, later, the F.B.I.?

6. Did you like the inclusion of photos throughout the story? How did that add to your understanding? Was there anything in particular that made an impression?

7. Can you recall your first impression of William Hale? How does the author bring to life his strengths and appeal, as well as the darker side of his nature?

8. In what ways does Tom White combine the qualities of the Old West and of the modern bureaucratic system Hoover is trying to create? Would you define him as the hero of the book? What about his post-investigative life?

9. Perhaps the most chilling aspect of the book is the marital and familial connections between murderers and their victims. What explains Ernest Burkhart’s actions even as he remained married to and had children with Mollie? How does Grann bring to life the particular horror of crimes committed within a family and a close-knit community?

10. Grann begins the third section of the book with the words: “So much is gone now,” including oil fields and boomtowns. But he also writes that the Osage nation has recovered in the decades since the murders, and today is a vibrant nation that’s 20,000 people strong. What do you think Grann wants us to take away from this?

11. How might you describe the experience of reading this book? Was it easy to delve into? Fast-paced? Dull?

**Cast of Characters**  
   
**The Family**  
**Mollie Burkhart**, a wealthy Osage woman whose family was targeted  
**Anna Brown**, Mollie’s oldest sister, a divorcee who spent a lot of time in the reservation’s rowdy boomtowns  
**Lizzie**, Mollie’s mother, deeply attached to Osage traditions even as the world around her changed; she suffered a slow, inexplicable death  
**Rita**, Mollie’s sister, and her husband, **Bill Smith**  
**Ernest Burkhart**, Mollie’s white husband, the father of her three children, and her official financial guardian  
**Bryan Burkhart**, Ernest’s younger brother  
**William Hale**, Ernest’s uncle, a self-made man of great wealth and staggering power; revered by many people as “King of the Osage Hills”   
**Margie Burkhart**, the granddaughter of Mollie and Ernest Burkhart; she shared her father’s memories of the “Reign of Terror” with Grann as well as stories about Mollie’s and Ernest’s lives in later years  
   
**The Bureau of Investigation**  
**J. Edgar Hoover**, the twenty-nine-year-old newly appointed director of the Bureau of Investigation; he saw the Osage cases as a way to redeem the bureau’s bad reputation and advance his own career  
**Tom White**, an old-style frontier lawman and former Texas Ranger who was put in charge of the investigation  
**John Wren**, recruited by White, he was then one of the few American Indians (perhaps the only one) in the bureau  
  
**Other Characters**  
**Barney McBride**, a white oilman who sought help for the Osage  
**W.W. Vaughan**, a lawyer who worked closely with private detectives trying to solve the Osage cases  
**James and David Shoun**, local doctors (and brothers)  
**Scott Mathis**, owner of the Big Hill Trading Company and a close friend of both Mollie Burkhart and William Hale; he managed Lizzie’s and Anna’s financial affairs and administered Anna’s estate  
**James Bighart**, the legendary chief of the Osage who negotiated the prescient treaty with the government to retain mineral rights for the tribe **George Bighart,** James’s nephew who gave information to W.W. Vaughan  
**Henry Roan,** briefly married to Mollie when they were young; he borrowed heavily from William Hale and made Hale the beneficiary of his insurance policy