

Borders

AUTHOR

THOMAS KING

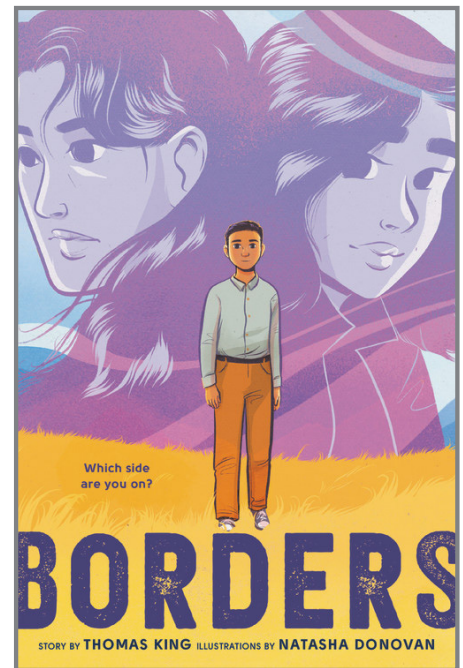
ILLUSTRATOR

NATASHA DONOVAN

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RECOMMENDED FOR: Mid to Upper Secondary



SYNOPSIS

Borders is a masterfully told story of a boy and his mother whose road trip from Alberta to Salt Lake City is thwarted at the border when they identify their citizenship as Blackfoot. Refusing to identify as either American or Canadian first bars their entry into the US, and then their return into Canada. In the limbo between countries, they find power in their connection to their identity and to each other.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Thomas King has written several highly acclaimed children's books including *A Coyote Solstice Tale* (illustrated by Gary Clement) which won the American Indian Library Association Youth Literature Award for Best Picture Book and *A Coyote Columbus Story* (illustrated by Kent Monkman) which was a Governor General's Award finalist. King, who is of Cherokee and Greek descent and was born in California, was chair of American Indian Studies at the University of Minnesota before moving to University of Guelph in Ontario, Canada. He recently won a Governor General's Award for his adult novel, *The Back of the Turtle*; he won both the BC National Award for Canadian Nonfiction and the RBC Taylor Prize for *The Inconvenient Indian*.

ABOUT THE ILLUSTRATOR

Natasha Donovan is a Metis illustrator with a focus on comics and children's illustration. She has illustrated several award-winning children's books including *The Sockeye Mother* by Brett Huson and the graphic novel *Surviving the City* by Tasha Spillett-Sumner. She has a degree in Anthropology from the University of British Columbia, and has worked in academic and magazine publishing. She currently lives in Bellingham, Washington.

STUDY NOTES

- Before reading the story, as a class discuss the book cover and title. Some things to include in your discussion could be:
 - What do you think this story might be about?
 - What types of borders are there, and which sort do you think the title might be referring to?
 - What are some countries that have land borders, and what are some that don't?
 - How does one cross a border?
 - What is the difference between a graphic novel and a comic? How can you tell?
- Which real life border is the title referring to?

- The boy's mother claims in the story that her citizenship is Blackfoot. What is the Blackfoot Nation, and where is it? In pairs or small groups research the history of the Blackfoot Nation. Use your findings to create a report about it. Some things you might like to include in your research could be:
 - Where is the Blackfoot Nation?
 - How do the Blackfoot people self-identify?
 - How long have the Blackfoot people lived where they do?
 - What was the effect of European Colonisation on the Blackfoot?
 - Are the Blackfoot considered to be one individual people, or a confederacy of groups? If so, who considers them to be this and why?
- How has the political organisation of the Blackfoot Nations changed since the creation of the US/Canadian border?
- Can you think of any other countries, nations or people who have been separated or divided by an imposed political border within the last 100 years?
- Is there a difference between a political border and a natural border, and if so, what is it? As a class, discuss the impact that geographical features such as oceans, mountain ranges and rivers can have on the formation of political and administrative entities. Consider whether they still impact the formation of modern countries today, and if so how and in what way?
- What is the personal impact of the Canadian/US border on the members of the Blackfoot Nation?
- Why do you think that the boy's mother in the story insists that her citizenship is Blackfoot, and refuses to say Canadian?
- Why do you think the presence of the media changes the way the border guards behave? What about them being there means that the boy and his mother are allowed to pass?
- Write a diary entry from the point of view of one of the border guards, sharing their experience of the whole situation.
- On a map of North America, locate Coutts, Sweetgrass and Salt Lake City. Using your research about the Blackfoot Nation, identify where these places all are in relation to the Blackfoot Nations' traditional lands and range.
- What does it mean when the boy's mother says that Laetitia hadn't left 'to chase rainbows down alleys'?
- What does it mean when the boy says 'if she wasn't spreading jelly on the truth'?
- The little boy in the story lives on a Reserve. What is a reserve, and why would he and his family live there?
- Laetitia wanted to move to Salt Lake City for a long time before she finally went, and when her brother and mother visited, she took them to see all the sights that she'd only read about before moving there. If you were going to visit Salt Lake City, what places would you most like to see while you were there? In small groups research Salt Lake City, and use your findings to create a tourist brochure like the ones Laetitia spent so long looking at.
- Create a two panel painting, with one panel a scene from around Blackfoot lands, and the other a scene from Salt Lake City.
- Write an account from the point of view of Laetitia, sharing what it was like for her when she first arrived in Salt Lake.
- Reread the graphic novel, looking carefully at all the imagery that is used throughout to signify USA and Canada. In small groups, discuss what you have noticed on your closer reread. Some things to consider in your discussion might be:
 - How many Canadian flags appear in the story?
 - How many USA flags appear in the book?
 - How many different contexts do these flags appear in? For example, as an incidental part of a larger illustration, or as a symbolic background emphasising that the difference between the two countries is important.
 - What other motifs or symbols appear that are representative of these two countries?
 - Why do you think the illustrator has incorporated so many flags within her artwork?
 - What is the impact of seeing these flags on the reader? How does it affect your understanding of the story, and of the stand that the boy's mother is taking in her border crossing?