

## Reading Guide

### *Come on Shore and We Will Kill and Eat You All: A New Zealand Story* by Christina Thompson

1. In her author's note, Thompson describes the book as "a mixture of history and memoir" and goes on to explain that she has adhered strictly to the truth except in those sections dealing with her husband's immediate family. "It is not their story I am telling," she writes, "it is mine; it would no doubt be very different if they told it." How does this disclosure affect your reading of the story and what do you think of her choice?
2. On the bus ride to Paihia, the landscape is described as "opening out before us like a nineteenth-century painting." What does this say about the sensibility of the narrator? Where else in the book do we see this way of looking at the world?
3. At the beginning of chapter 2, the author describes her first meeting with Seven as a kind of "contact encounter." What does she mean by this? Is this an appropriate metaphor? Is it a stretch? Why or why not?
4. At the end of chapter 2, Seven explains what was really going on during the fight in the pub. How does this explanation differ from the narrator's understanding of the situation? Why does she "get it all wrong," and where else in the book do we see this happen?
5. In chapter 3, the narrator talks about her time alone in Mangonui: "Sometimes I went for walks, wandering up the road or into the bush beyond the houses. I liked the drone of the cicadas in the midday heat, and the crunch of the dry grass, and the strange, pungent smell of something, an aromatic tree or shrub that I could never locate but that would suddenly surround me like some kind of enchantment and then vanish if I took another step." What is happening here? What other images in this chapter give you the same kind of feeling?
6. Chapter 4 takes us away from New Zealand and fills in some of the narrator's background, including details of her childhood and an account of how she ended up in the antipodes as a graduate student. Why do you think Thompson does this here? What is she trying to say about the narrator? How do the themes examined in this chapter relate to other aspects of the book?
7. When the narrator returns to school in chapter 5, she tells her thesis supervisor that she has been doing "field work." What does she mean by this, and why does she say that she "wasn't entirely joking"? How does this assertion relate to her

claim in the previous chapter that “my scholarship was entangled with my life”?

8. What does the story of the doorbell tell you about Seven? What kind of person is he? How is he different from the narrator? Which of his qualities does she admire? Which ones do you think might drive her crazy?
9. What does the narrator mean when she writes in chapter 5: “What was funny about living with Seven was the way these musty paradigms, so easy to dismiss in theory, would periodically spring to life”? Which “musty paradigms” is she referring to? Why are they “easy to dismiss in theory”? What happens when they “spring to life”?
10. Why does the narrator tell the story of Charlotte Badger? What does she mean when she says that perhaps some people are “more plastic and more naturally savage” than others?
11. How does the author’s American family react to Seven? Why does the narrator tell the story of Omai in chapter 7? How do the events in this chapter relate to the “musty paradigms” of chapter 5? What is the narrator’s attitude toward “the staying power of these conceits”?
12. How do you feel when you discover that the narrator’s father has kept, but never mentioned, the newspaper clipping about a racially charged murder in New Zealand? How does this complicate the picture presented in the previous chapter?
13. What is the point of the story about Cook/Hawkesworth/Darwin described in chapter 8? Why do you think the author chose the quote from Darwin as the title of the book?
14. What does the narrator mean when she says in chapter 9 of the photograph of General Robley, “This picture tells a story of colonialism, but it is not a story about the impact of one culture upon another like a hammer on a nail. It is more like the story of two systems colliding, like trains heading in opposite directions that have been mistakenly shunted onto the same track”? What do most people think colonialism is? How, according to the narrator, is it different?
15. What does the narrator mean in chapter 10 when she says that “what had begun as a romance of two individuals was transformed by this event into an entanglement of tribes, a web of indebtedness and responsibility that extended not only into the future but back into the past”? How does her discovery that she is pregnant influence her thinking about their respective histories?

16. In chapter 12 the narrator and Seven disagree about the role of South America in Polynesian prehistory. Do you think this argument is emblematic of more general differences between them? And if so, are these differences personal or cultural?
17. What is the narrator getting at when she talks about Alan Duff as a “cultural hybrid”? Who else in the story might belong in this category? What do you think about the claim that cultures have different values? How important is it to be open to other cultural values? How difficult is it to change the values with which one has been raised?
18. Why, in chapter 16, does the narrator introduce the subject of American history? What parallels are there with New Zealand, and what is the point of the story about the “Steele Block”?
19. What does the narrator want her children to understand from the letter in chapter 17? And where else in the book does she describe herself as someone who cares primarily “for freedom, for adventure, for risk and the charm of the unexpected, for the gamble of not always knowing what was going on”?
20. Why do you think the book begins and ends with Abel Tasman? What do you think the narrator means when she says about history that “what matters is both the way it changes and the way it stays the same: the particularity and the pattern, the dancer and the dance”?