Study Questions
for Thomas King's The Truth about Stories: A Native Narrative

Chapter 1, "'You'll never believe what happened' Is Always a Great Way to Start"

- What are the elements of good storytelling, according to this chapter?
- Why does King tell readers about his mother and father?
- What are some important differences between the biblical story of creation and Native stories of creation?
- King makes a sometimes pointed critique of the biblical creation story and the values it represents to him: how is he able to make these critical comments while still keeping readers interested?

Chapter 2, "You're Not the Indian I Had in Mind"

- According to King, what's wrong with "postcard Indians" or the photographs Edward Curtis made of Native peoples?
- Why does King tell the story about when he asked "Karen Butler" to the prom? And how does this story fit into the broader themes of the chapter?
- What are some of the superficial ways people use to decide who is a real, "authentic" Indian?
- Is there a difference between a stereotypical image of an Indian and a racist image? Find an example of each in this chapter.

Chapter 3, "Let Me Entertain You"

- When you read this chapter, you'll know for sure that King has decided to begin all of the chapters of his book with the same basic structure. Why does he choose to repeat the same words/themes? What might he wish to emphasize by repeating this opening?
- How does the story of Ishi fit into the major themes of this chapter?
- Describe in your own words how European explorers (such as Columbus, de Caminha, and Cartier) viewed Native peoples when they first encountered them. How do their views and attitudes compare to those of the Puritans?
Chapter 4, "A Million Porcupines Crying in the Dark"

- Where does the title for this chapter come from, and what does it mean?
- Why does King tell the tragic story of his good friend Louis Owens?
- In this chapter, King has a lot to say about important themes and motifs found in books by contemporary Native writers. List two or three of them.
- What is a "saving story"? Describe what King means by this phrase as fully as possible.

Chapter 5, "What Is It About Us That You Don't Like?"

- Is the story of Coyote and the ducks that King tells in this chapter a "saving story," or what is its purpose?
- Describe in your own words the ways in which the Canadian and US governments have tried to "legislate Indians out of existence." Were you surprised at all to learn how much federal governments are involved in defining who is an Indian, what lands are held by Indians, as well as whether Indians can practice their own traditions?
- How does King's experience as a deer culler fit into the rest of the chapter?

Afterwords: Private Stories

- In this chapter, King has a lot to say about the importance of stories. Identify three key passages on this theme.
- Are good stories always ethical? Why or why not?
- Does King's telling the story of John and Amy Cardinal make a difference—to him or to us? Why does he tell this "private story"?
- Notice that this chapter ends with the same phrasing as all the others in the book: does hearing King's stories make you want to live your life differently in any way?