

*Martin County Library System Book Discussion Kit:*

## The Wager by David Grann

### Included in the Kit:

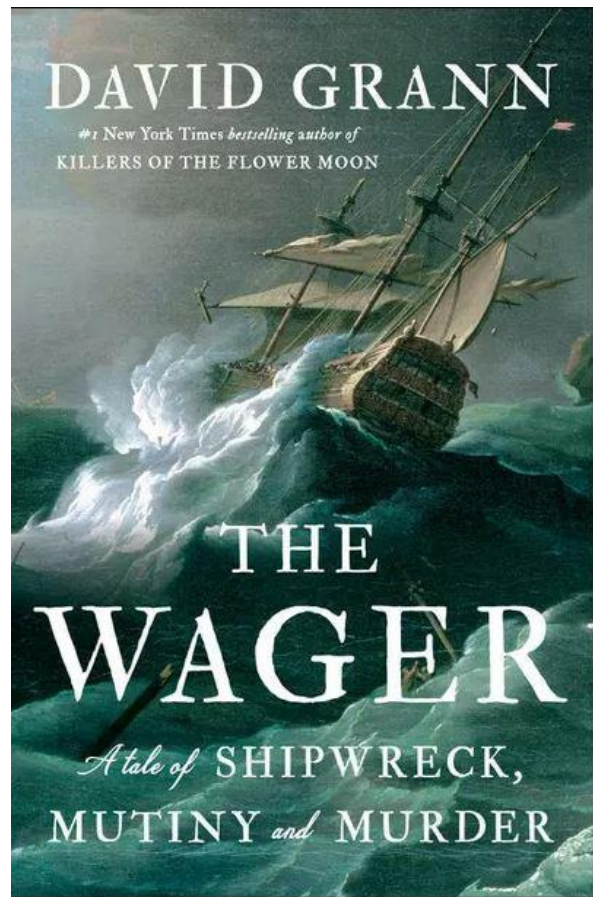
- Book summary
- Author biography
- Discussion questions
- Recipe suggestions

### Book Summary:

From the #1 *New York Times* bestselling author of *Killers of the Flower Moon* and *The Lost City of Z*, a mesmerizing story of shipwreck, survival, and savagery, culminating in a court martial that reveals a shocking truth.

On January 28, 1742, a ramshackle vessel of patched-together wood and cloth washed up on the coast of Brazil. Inside were thirty emaciated men, barely alive, and they had an extraordinary tale to tell.

They were survivors of *His Majesty's Ship the Wager*, a British vessel that had left England in 1740 on a secret mission during an imperial war with Spain. While the *Wager* had been chasing a Spanish treasure-filled galleon known as "the prize of all the oceans," it had wrecked on a desolate island off the coast of Patagonia. The men, after being marooned for months and



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facing starvation, built the flimsy craft and sailed for more than a hundred days, traversing 2500 miles of storm-wracked seas. They were greeted as heroes.

But then...six months later, another, even more decrepit craft landed on the coast of Chile. This boat contained just three castaways, and they told a very different story. The thirty sailors who landed in Brazil were not heroes – they were mutineers. The first group responded with countercharges of their own, of a tyrannical and murderous senior officer and his henchmen. It became clear that while stranded on the island the crew had fallen into anarchy, with warring factions fighting for dominion over the barren wilderness. As accusations of treachery and murder flew, the Admiralty convened a court martial to determine who was telling the truth. The stakes were life-and-death—for whomever the court found guilty could hang.

*The Wager* is a grand tale of human behavior at the extremes told by one of our greatest nonfiction writers. Grann's recreation of the hidden world on a British warship rivals the work of Patrick O'Brian, his portrayal of the castaways' desperate straits stands up to the classics of survival writing such as *The Endurance*, and his account of the court martial has the savvy of a Scott Turow thriller. As always with Grann's work, the incredible twists of the narrative hold the reader spellbound. Most powerfully, he unearths the deeper meaning of the events, showing that it was not only the *Wager's* captain and crew who were on trial – it was the very idea of empire.

Source: Author's website (<https://www.davidgrann.com/>)





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## Meet the Author:

David Grann is a #1 *New York Times* bestselling author and an award-winning staff writer at *The New Yorker* magazine.

Grann holds master's degrees in international relations (from the Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy) and creative writing (from Boston University). After graduating from Connecticut College, in 1989, he received a Thomas J. Watson Fellowship and did research in Mexico, where he began his career in journalism. He currently lives in New York with his wife and two children.



Source: Author's website (<https://www.davidgrann.com>)



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## Discussion Questions:

1. Why did the *Wager* crash? Was the expedition of the *Wager* destined to fail? Why or why not?
2. Why would someone want to join the British navy in the 1700s? What are the advantages and disadvantages of a career in the navy during this time?
3. What are three ways that racism and colonialism impacted what happened with the *Wager's* crew and how they perceived their experiences? How did colonialism and racism impact events surrounding the *Wager* and the accounts emerging from them?
4. What was the most memorable part of this book for you? Why did it make an impression?
5. Read your favorite passage from the book out loud and explain why you liked it or what it made you think about.
6. Was this non-fiction book fun to read, or was it a little dry? Did the author need to "spice it up" or "tone it down"? How could they have managed that?
7. What made this book different than other books on this subject? Do you think it is better or worse than other books on this subject matter?

Source: The Book Club Guide Blog  
(<https://www.book-club-guide.com/book-club-questions.html>)

## Recipes:

### HardTack

- 1 ¼ cups white flour
- ½ cup water
- ½ teaspoon salt

Preheat oven to 375 degrees F. Measure flour and salt into a bowl and mix. Pour water in slowly while stirring. Keep mixing until dough begins to form a ball. Turn onto a floured surface and knead for 5-10 minutes until smooth and elastic, sprinkling with extra flour if dough sticks too much to counter or hands. Roll out until the dough is around ¼ - ½" thick. Cut the dough into squares approximately 2x2" and pierce with holes using a chop stick. The holes help the crackers to bake evenly and make it easier to break once it is cool. Transfer to a baking sheet and bake at 375 degrees F for 20 – 25 minutes. Flip all the crackers with a spatula halfway through. Hardtack will be light tan when done. Cool on a baking rack before eating.



Source: Herreshoff Marine Museum  
(<https://herreshoff.org/2020/04/a-recipe-for-hardtack/>)

## Salt Pork Soup

- 6 Pints Boiling Water
- Salt Pork
- Carrots
- Parsnips
- Salt
- Pepper
- Bay Leaf
- Cider Vinegar
- Cabbage
- Rosemary
- Thyme
- Cubed Bread



When using salt pork you have to soak it. It takes several hours to soak it in water, change the water out and soak it again, until it's ready to use. If you don't soak it several times and get all the salt out, it's inedible. Brown the salt pork in a little bit of fat to release the flavor. Let it set and sear a little bit at a time. Too much at once will release too many juices and it will not caramelize properly. Once your salt pork is browned, it's time to dump it in your boiling water. If any scum develops on the surface, scrape that off. You're going to let this boil about 15 minutes. Now that our soup has boiled about 15 minutes with the meat in it, it's time to add some carrots and parsnips. Season with salt and pepper, a bay leaf, and a little bit of cider vinegar. Just a splash or two of cider vinegar will really set this off. Moderate the fire a little bit and let it simmer for about an hour. Add cabbage a little bit of bundled rosemary and thyme. You don't want to put this stuff in too soon or it'll destroy the flavors. Many period recipes for soup like this will call for bread to be cubed up and tossed in at the end, kind of like dumplings. Let this simmer for another 15 minutes.

Source: Townsends Blog (<https://www.townsends.us/blogs/blog/salt-pork-soup>)

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