

Tallgrass

by Sandra Dallas

About the Book

During World War II, a family finds life turned upside down when the government opens a Japanese internment camp in their small Colorado town. After a young girl is murdered, all eyes (and suspicions) turn to the newcomers, the interlopers, the strangers.

This is her town as Rennie Stroud has never seen it before. She has just turned thirteen and, until this time, life has pretty much been what her father told her it should be: predictable and fair. But now the winds of change are coming and, with them, a shift in her perspective. And Rennie will discover secrets that can destroy even the most sacred things.

Part thriller, part historical novel, *Tallgrass* is a riveting exploration of the darkest---and best---parts of the human heart.

Courtesy of St. Martin's Press

Praise for the Book

“Tallgrass is a must-read for every American. . . . Sandra Dallas captures the feelings of people in eastern Colorado, a part of the great American plains. Residents thought they were isolated from the great global conflict, but the winds of change deposited one of the internment camps in their midst. What a setting for a novel!”

—*former congresswoman Pat Schroeder, president and chief executive officer of the Association of American Publishers (AAP)*

“Definitely capturing regional voice as well as period detail, Sandra Dallas weaves a vivid portrait of a Colorado farm town unsettled by change and divided by mistrust on the World War II home front. Tallgrass is a compelling and genuinely moving novel that will keep readers guessing until the last page.”

—*Jennifer Chiaverini, author of Circle of Quilters*

Courtesy Reading Group Guides

About the Author

Title: Sandra Dallas Atchison

Known As: Dallas, Sandra; Atchison, Sandra Dallas
American Writer (1939 -)

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Personal Information:

Born June 11, 1939, in Washington, DC; daughter of Forrest Everett and Harriett Dallas; married Robert Thomas Atchison (in real estate management), April 20, 1963; children: Dana Dallas and Povy Kendal. Education: University of Denver, B.A., 1960.

Memberships: Western Writers of America, Women's Forum of Colorado, Denver

Woman's Press Club. Addresses: Homeoffice: Denver, CO. E-mail:

Sandra@sandradallas.com.

Career:

Writer, journalist. *Business Week*, Denver, CO, editorial assistant, 1961-63; *University of Denver* magazine, Denver, 1965-66; *Business Week*, editorial assistant, 1967-69, bureau chief, 1969-85, senior correspondent, 1985-90. Historic Denver, Inc., member of board of directors, 1979-82, 1984-87; Visiting Nurse Association, Denver, member of board of directors, 1983-85; Rocky Mountain Quilt Museum, member of board of directors, 2001-; Historic Georgetown Inc., member of board of directors, 2002.

Awards:

Wrangler Award, National Cowboy Hall of Fame, 1980; named Exceptional Chronicler of Western History, Women's Library Association and Denver Public Library Friends Foundation, 1986; finalist, Western Writers of America Best Western Novel of 1998 for *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*; Spur Award for Best Western Novel, Western Writers of America, 2003, for *The Chili Queen*; Women Writing the West Willa Award, 2005, for *New Mercies*.

Works:

Writings:

Nonfiction

- *Gold and Gothic*, Lick Skillet Press (Denver, CO), 1967.
- *Gaslights and Gingerbread: Colorado's Historic Homes*, Sage Books (Denver, CO), 1965; revised edition, Swallow Press (Athens, OH), 1984.
- *No More Than Five in a Bed: Colorado Hotels in the Old Days*, University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, OK), 1967.
- *Vail*, Pruett (Boulder, CO), 1969.
- *Cherry Creek Gothic: Victorian Architecture in Denver*, University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, OK), 1971.
- *Yesterday's Denver*, E.A. Seeman (Miami, FL), 1974.
- *Sacred Paint: Ned Jacob*, Fenn Galleries (Kansas City, MO), 1979.
- *Colorado Ghost Towns and Mining Camps*, with photographs by daughter Povy Kendal Atchison, University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, OK), 1985.
- *Colorado Homes*, with photographs by Dallas and daughter Povy Kendal Atchison, University of Oklahoma Press (Norman, OK), 1986.
- *Crazy for Quilts: A Celebration of the Quilter's Art*, edited by Margret Aldrich, Voyageur Press (Stillwater, MN), 2002.
- (Writings, artwork, and photographs) *Once Upon a Quilt: A Scrapbook of Quilting Past and Present*, edited by Margret Aldrich, Voyageur Press (Stillwater, MN), 2003.
- *The Quilt That Walked to Golden*, with photography by Povy Kendal, Breckling Press (Elmhurst, IL), 2004.

Fiction

- *Buster Midnight's Café*, Random House (New York, NY), 1990.
- *The Persian Pickle Club*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1995.
- *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 1997.
- *Alice's Tulips*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2000.
- *The Chili Queen*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2002.
- *New Mercies*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2005.
- *Tallgrass*, St. Martin's Press (New York, NY), 2007.

Regional book columnist, *Denver Post*, 1980--. Writer of articles for magazines. Book reviewer, *Denver Post*, 1962--.

media adaptations:

The Persian Pickle Club has been adapted for audio.

“Sidelights”

Sandra Dallas was called by Jane Smiley in *Vogue*, "a quintessential American voice." Dallas's nonfiction focuses on the history and architecture of the western United States. She writes about historic homes and hotels, ghost towns and mining camps, and cities like Denver and Vail. Her fiction, however, examines small-town America and the intricate relationships of the ordinary people who live there.

Dallas's first novel, *Buster Midnight's Café*, explores the background of a fictional movie star named Marion Street and her lover, a boxer named Buster Midnight, both of whom had been exposed in a Hollywood murder case. Effa, the narrator of the novel, attempts to balance published reports of the scandal against her own recollections of growing up with Buster and Marion in Butte, Montana, in the 1920s and 1930s. Effa speaks, according to *Publishers Weekly* reviewer Sybil S. Steinberg, "in a sharp and snappy voice that captures the reader's interest on the very first page." Steinberg praised the author for creating "a remarkable cluster of enduring friendships that ... accurately reflect the flavor of a small town."

The Persian Pickle Club represents "a colorful exploration of Depression-era Kansas and the meaning of friendship," wrote Suzanne Berne in the *New York Times Book Review*. Once a week, in a small town in rural Kansas, a group of farmers' wives gathers to sit and sew, share gossip, and trade scraps of cloth for their handmade quilts. The most treasured pieces of cloth contain a paisley pattern that the quilters call a "Persian pickle," and they have named their sewing circle the Persian Pickle Club. The communal work of quilting draws the women ever closer to one another, and the silence of their activity encourages conversation. Over long hours of stitching and storytelling, they develop bonds of friendship and loyalty that enable them to surmount the sorrows and hardships of country life during the Depression. The narrator of the tale is quilter Queenie Bean. Steinberg reported in *Publishers Weekly* that the novel is enlivened by "the narrator's humorous down-home voice," and Keddy Ann Outlaw wrote in *Library Journal* that Queenie "narrates the novel with snappy style." Berne complimented the author's "knack for capturing the quirky details of [the quilters'] lives."

The insularity of the circle is pierced by the arrival of Rita Ritter, a lively "city girl" from Denver, who has married a local farmer. Rita joins the club but, unsuited for a sedentary activity that nonetheless requires mechanical precision, patience, and dexterity, she searches for a more exciting form of entertainment. Rita decides to pursue her dream of becoming a newspaper reporter. News stories are scarce in Harveyville, Kansas, however, until a man's body is found buried in a local field. The man is identified as the missing husband of quilter Ella Crook, and Rita determines to solve the mystery of his death by probing the innermost secrets of the Persian Pickle Club. According to a critic for *Kirkus Reviews*, Rita "finds the wall of feminine loyalty unyielding." The same reviewer called *The Persian Pickle Club* "a tale of pioneer justice and impenetrable loyalty." Steinberg called it "a simple but endearing story that depicts small-town eccentricities with affection."

A reviewer for *Kirkus Reviews* commented that with *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, as with *The Persian Pickle Club*, "Dallas has caught the lilt and drift of region speech" in this story set on the open plains of nineteenth-century Colorado. When, at the age of twenty-two, the sweet, simple, and plain protagonist, Mattie, is chosen by handsome Luke Spenser as his wife, she barely believes it. The couple leaves Iowa in a Conestoga wagon to homestead Luke's land in Colorado. Mattie records the journey and life after their arrival in her diary. The story that develops from her journaling describes how a despised "slattern" (a derogatory term for a promiscuous woman) ultimately becomes a devoted friend and an adored husband becomes a betrayer. GraceAnne DeCandido for *Booklist* called this a "ripping good read" and was caught up in the lives of the people living on the prairie, from building homes and rearing children to changing attitudes about society's outcasts. DeCandido noted that "the growth of Mattie as a person" unfolds in a setting of "what seems like genuine details of prairie life."

In *Alice's Tulips*, another innocent young woman is tossed into the harsh environment of farm life in Iowa. Set during the Civil War, the story finds the teenager, Alice--married for just one year--alone with a stern and formidable mother-in-law when her husband leaves to become a Union soldier. To ease her isolation, the hardships of working a farm, and the longing for her seven siblings, Alice begins writing long, gossipy letters to her sister, Lizzie, and develops a talent and passion for quilting. The newly pregnant Alice hopes the baby will draw her mother-in-law closer to her. However, a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* likened Alice to a Northern Scarlett O'Hara and observed that Alice is unschooled in dealing with people. For example, "She regularly boasts about her superior sewing skills, yearns aloud for fashionable clothing and speaks before she thinks. In other words, she is young and ignorant of the ways of the world." Her innocent flirtations with a Confederate sympathizer are taken by him as encouragement, and his determined pursuit tarnishes her reputation. Ultimately finding herself accused of murder, Alice finds help from unlikely sources. *Booklist* reviewer Margaret Flanagan commented that readers enjoy "this charming, homespun narrative" because it is "laced with plenty of whimsy, pathos, and intrigue."

Dallas offers a new spin on Westerns with *The Chili Queen*, in which a jilted mail-order bride, Emma Roby, turns bank robber and loveable con artist. *Booklist* reviewer Kaite Mediatore praised the "affection and zest" with which Dallas fills out the secondary characters in this novel, which is "sure to garner new fans and satisfy existing ones." Further praise came from a *Kirkus Reviews* critic who found the novel "as satisfying as a John Ford movie, with just the right touches of humor and period detail." Likewise, a *Publishers Weekly* contributor noted: "The zesty, offbeat charm of life among these undesirables in the seedy West keeps this tale moving smartly."

Dallas sets her 2005 novel, *New Mercies*, in Mississippi in the 1930s. Nora Bondurant, now living in Colorado, has inherited her father's old family place, Avoca, and arrives to take possession. The house is filled with memories and perhaps ghosts, for it was the scene of the murder of her aunt and the suicide of the killer. As Nora begins to settle in, it is unclear if she will keep the place and become part of Southern society or sell it and return to Colorado. She increasingly is drawn into the mystery of her aunt's death and to

the spell the house and her family's history casts over her. Reviewing the work in *Bookreporter.com*, Jennifer McCord wrote that the author is "a gifted writer who can make history come alive through her characters and their circumstances." Similarly, *Booklist* reviewer Mediatore termed *New Mercies* "a honey-and-Spanish-moss-tinged tale certain to please gentle fiction readers who don't mind a little mystery."

Dallas's 2007 novel, *Tallgrass*, deals with the internment of Japanese Americans in Colorado during World War II. As Dallas explained to *Bookreporter.com* contributor Alexis Burling, she had an initial decision to make about point of view: "Since I'm not Japanese, I couldn't tell the story from a Japanese point of view. That would have been presumptuous. Besides, *Tallgrass* is not so much about the Japanese experience as it is about the people living in the nearby town of Ellis, and how the camp affects them. So, the story is told from the viewpoint of a 13-year-old Caucasian girl. I wanted a narrator who was steeped in right and wrong, someone who did not yet understand that fear engenders prejudice and hatred, a young person with the courage to ask questions." The novel follows the changes wrought on the citizens of the nearby town by the arrival of the interned and the crisis which the brutal rape and murder of a young girl brings to the area. Burling found the resulting novel "a venerable blend of historical fact and engrossing fiction." Further praise came from *Booklist* contributor Allison Block, who felt Dallas "renders a dramatic (and surprisingly droll) coming-of-age tale in which ignorance breeds malice, with brutal results " For Lesa M. Holstine, writing in *Library Journal*, the same work is a "strong, provocative novel [that] is a moving examination of prejudice and fear." And a reviewer for *Publishers Weekly* called *Tallgrass* a "special treat."

further readings:

Further Readings About the Author:

Periodicals

- *American Artist*, January-February, 1980, p. 52; April, 1980, p. 29.
- *Booklist*, May 15, 1997, GraceAnne DeCandido, review of *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, p. 1560; September 15, 2000, Margaret Flanagan, review of *Alice's Tulips*, p. 215; September 1, 2002, Kaite Mediatore, review of *The Chili Queen*, p. 55; February 1, 2005, Kaite Mediatore, review of *New Mercies*, p. 940; January 1, 2007, Allison Block, review of *Tallgrass*, p. 49.
- *Kirkus Reviews*, August 1, 1995, review of *The Persian Pickle Club*, p. 1042; April 1, 1997, review of *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, p. 482; July 15, 2002, review of *The Chili Queen*, p. 975.
- *Library Journal*, April 15, 1990, p. 122; September 1, 1995, p. 206; December, 1996, Keddy Ann Outlaw, review of *The Persian Pickle Club*, p. 180; November 15, 1997, review of *The Diary of Mattie Spenser*, p. 100; February 15, 2007, Lesa M. Holstine, review of *Tallgrass*, p. 109.
- *Los Angeles Times*, July 20, 1990, p. E-14.
- *New York Times Book Review*, June 3, 1990, p. 39; November 12, 1995, Suzanne Berne, review of *The Persian Pickle Club*.

- *Publishers Weekly*, February 16, 1990, pp. 66-67; July 31, 1995, p. 67; September 4, 2000, review of *Alice's Tulips*, p. 81; August 5, 2002, review of *The Chili Queen*, p. 52; February 26, 2007, review of *Tallgrass*, p. 56.
- *School Library Journal*, November, 1990, p. 149; January, 2000, Frances Reiher, review of *Alice's Tulips*, p. 159.
- *Travel-Holiday*, October, 1985, p. 107.
- *Vogue*, April, 1990, Jane Smiley, review of *Buster Midnight's Cafe*, p. 278.
- *Wilson Library Bulletin*, November, 1990, p. BT4.

Other

- *Bookreporter.com*, <http://www.bookreporter.com/> (April 6, 2007), Alexis Burling, interview with Sandra Dallas; (July 27, 2007), Alexis Burling, review of *Tallgrass*, Jennifer McCord, review of *New Mercies*.
- *Sandra Dallas Home Page*, <http://www.sandradallas.com> (July 27, 2007).*

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Author Interview

Sandra Dallas Interview

April 6, 2007

Author and journalist Sandra Dallas has written 10 nonfiction books and seven novels, including her latest work of fiction, TALLGRASS. In this interview with Bookreporter.com's Alexis Burling, Dallas describes the past and current events that inspired this story, which revolves around Japanese internment camps during World War II, and discusses the amount of research she conducted in preparation for the book. She also reveals some of her characters' real-life counterparts, explains how the elements of the plot have evolved during the writing process and shares what she hopes readers will take away from the novel.

Bookreporter.com: What inspired you to write TALLGRASS?

Sandra Dallas: I was moved by a book, AMACHE: The Story of Japanese Internment in Colorado During World War II, which I reviewed for the *Denver Post*. It tells how some 100,000 people of Japanese ancestry living on the West Coast in 1942 were forced to leave their homes to live in 10 desolate inland relocation camps. One of them was Amache, in the southeast corner of Colorado. These people --- many born in the U.S. --- lost their homes, businesses and possessions; each was allowed to take only what could be put into a single suitcase. I had actually visited the site in the 1960s, when I was pheasant hunting with a friend who lived nearby. The camp was then just cement slabs and roads bladed into the prairie. Intrigued, I researched Amache and discovered that, after the war, some of its buildings were sold to the University of Denver to accommodate veterans attending college on the GI Bill. The buildings remained for years, and my DU journalism classes were held in one. At the same time I read the book, I was disturbed by news reports that in the wake of the Iraq war, men were being held in Guantanamo Bay without charges. I wondered if once again, in a time of national fear, we were denying civil rights to human beings. All that led me to write TALLGRASS.

BRC: Why did you choose to tell this story through the eyes of a 13-year-old girl?

SD: Since I'm not Japanese, I couldn't tell the story from a Japanese point of view. That would have been presumptuous. Besides, TALLGRASS is not so much about the Japanese experience as it is about the people living in the nearby town of Ellis, and how the camp affects them. So, the story is told from the viewpoint of a 13-year-old Caucasian girl. I wanted a narrator who was steeped in right and wrong, someone who did not yet understand that fear engenders prejudice and hatred, a young person with the courage to ask questions. My characters represent various points of view. Some are filled with hate. Others are compassionate. Most are somewhere in between, which I think is the way the majority of Americans were during the war. Even President Franklin D. Roosevelt felt that taking away the civil liberties of a group of U.S. citizens was all right if it helped win the war. Eleanor, of course, didn't agree with him.

BRC: Toward the middle of the book, a group of drunk, rowdy men from town head out to the camp, threatening all sorts of trouble. Rennie's father and the sheriff head out to squelch the looming violence, but the one who stops it all is Rennie's mother --- by standing outside in her nightgown, calling each man by name and mentioning his wife. The power in this scene is subtle, yet so far-reaching. What can be learned by Rennie's mother's actions? By her character in general?

SD: That scene was added in the final draft of TALLGRASS, when I wanted to expand on Mary Stroud's reaction to the hatred around her. Mary is a woman with strong views, but still, she is concerned about what other people think. When she leaves the house, Mary plans to stay hidden. She goes into the field only to make sure that her daughter is safe. Mary doesn't want to get involved, but when faced with an incendiary event, she cannot stand by and see people get hurt. She diffuses the situation not by confronting the men, but by shaming them. Afterwards, instead of being proud that she has stopped a riot, she is embarrassed that she is standing out in a field in her nightgown.

BRC: Throughout everything, Rennie's parents treat her as a grown-up. Although they do shield her from a few things, they mostly treat her with love and respect, and share various truths with her, even if the reality is hard to deal with. The same can be said about their full-disclosure relationship with each other. Why did you portray the Strouds in this way? What can readers learn from their behavior?

SD: Rennie's parents treat her like an adult because they expect her to act like one. With her brother and sister away, she has to shoulder more work on the farm. With increased responsibility comes increased respect --- and privileges; for the first time, Rennie's mother offers her a cup of coffee. The Strouds are decent people. Granny is loved and honored, although she suffers dementia. (Granny, by the way, is the sister of Mattie Spenser in THE DIARY OF MATTIE SPENSER, and Granny and Mattie's people, the McCauleys, are one strong family.) You have to realize that Lloyd Stroud, Rennie's father, is based on my dad, who grew up on a Kansas farm, and Mary Stroud, to a slight degree, is my mom. So the Stroud marriage is patterned after my parents' marriage, which was loving and supportive, and was filled with respect and humor. Like the Strouds, my folks had suffered hardship during the Depression, and surviving the hard times together strengthened their commitment to each other. Incidentally, my folks weren't perfect, and neither are the Strouds. Dad died in 1973, Mom in 2001.

BRC: You capture the languid western drawl of 1940s Colorado perfectly. The words just seem to roll off your characters' tongues. How did you develop such a knack for dialogue? Are you native to Colorado?

SD: I made them sound like my Dad. I'd thought he was the only one who said "awful good." I found out everybody in Kansas and eastern Colorado says it.

I was born in Washington, D.C. but moved to Colorado when I was six and consider myself a westerner. I get dialogue by reading period books and newspapers, but mostly just by eavesdropping on people. I was a reporter for 35 years, and I trained myself to

listen for quotes. That's dialogue.

BRC: Where did you get the idea for The Jolly Stitchers? They are a hoot!

SD: In 2004, I wrote a book about quilting in Colorado and the Mountain States, *THE QUILT THAT WALKED TO GOLDEN*. Researching it, I came across a quilt group called The Jolly Stitchers in eastern Colorado. One woman wrote that she wouldn't have made it through those difficult years of the dust bowl without the support and friendship of The Jolly Stitchers. So I swiped that name for Mary Stroud's quilt group.

BRC: How did you prepare for researching/writing this book?

SD: To research *TALLGRASS*, I read books about the internment camps and interviewed friends who were evacuees. And of course, I walked the dirt roads of Amache to get a sense of place. That's my favorite thing to do when writing a book --- visiting the setting to soak up atmosphere (which is why I want to set a book in Hawaii or the south of France.) But this book really is not about the internment camps; it is about hate and prejudice as well as human decency in a small town. I read about World War II and farming, including tracts on sugar beet farming. On the Internet, I came across a great book on how to raise chickens. I wished Mom had still been around so that I could ask her about raising chickens on our farm in Virginia, where I spent the first years of my life.

BRC: Did the story change at all from when you first started writing it to its final draft?

SD: The major change that occurred when I was writing the book was the emergence of the father as a pivotal character. I think I don't do men as well as women, so Loyal was to be a good person but a little vague; Mary was going to be the moral force in the book. But as I wrote, Loyal emerged as my own father, with Dad's mannerisms, language, humor and even his old pickup truck, Red Boy. He just took over the book.

BRC: Wow! What an ending! Without giving away all of the juicy details, what would you like your readers to take away from their experience with *TALLGRASS*?

SD: I'm hoping that *TALLGRASS* will make readers understand how precious our civil rights are, that they must be protected, even in fearful times --- especially in such times. One of the things that makes America a great country is that we protect the rights of people we despise. I want readers to believe that when people do what is right, good can triumph.

BRC: *TALLGRASS* is being touted as a modern-day *TO KILL A MOCKINGBIRD*. What do you make of this comparison? Do you agree?

SD: I think that's great! I wish Harper Lee did, too.

BRC: Given the current state of the world, TALLGRASS's content will surely resonate quite heavily with more than a few readers. Were you aware of this fact when writing the book? Did you draw intentional parallels to what's going on today in the Middle East, Guantanamo Bay and elsewhere?

SD: I didn't intentionally draw parallels between World War II internment camps and Guantanamo, but I certainly hope readers get them. For all I knew, when I started the book, the situation at Guantanamo would be only a memory by the time TALLGRASS was published. Unfortunately, it's not.

BRC: You've written six other novels and two works of nonfiction --- all exploring aspects of history, from quilting (ALICE'S TULIPS; THE QUILT THAT WALKED TO GOLDEN) to Colorado mining towns (COLORADO GHOST TOWNS AND MINING CAMPS) to a murder in 1930s Mississippi (NEW MERCIES) to THE PERSIAN PICKLE CLUB and others. Why do you think you're drawn to history in your writing? Do you ever see yourself exploring another genre, like a memoir or contemporary fiction?

SD: Actually, I wrote nine nonfiction books before I turned to novels (and another nonfiction book a couple of years ago). All were about the West, and all but one were about history. My folks took my brother and sisters and me to historic places when we were growing up, even when those places were in the middle of the slums. I thought when I wrote my first novel, BUSTER MIDNIGHT'S CAFÉ, that I was writing an historical novel. My editor took out most of the research, however, saying that it got in the way of the story. And when the book was published, I discovered I hadn't written about history at all, but about loyalty and friendship. Those seem to be the themes of my writing. I don't know what I'm going to write next, because I never know what's going to pop into my mind. I don't plan books rationally. I wait for what James Michener called "the magical moment," when, Pow!, the idea hits me.

BRC: What are you working on now, and when might readers expect to see it?

SD: I've just finished a novel set in the gold-dredging country of Summit County, Colorado, in 1936. It includes characters from almost all of my other novels. I've also completed a very personal narrative for SANDRA DALLAS SAMPLER, a book of quilt patterns from my novels. Neither has a publication date.

Courtesy Bookreporter.com

Discussion Questions

1. Rennie's parents caution her frequently not to lie. How well do they succeed in following their own advice? How akin is the way they keep large secrets (that Marthalice was pregnant, that Mary is very sick) to lying to their friends and daughter? Why do they draw the line against pretending Daisy was married before she got pregnant, but conspire with the Sheriff to dupe the town later?
2. Tallgrass shows Rennie dealing with tough issues: rape, murder, prejudice, and danger to her family. How much of her opinions seem to come from her parents, and how much from her own observations? What did you think of her still being afraid of "the Japs," even after she got to know and respect the Japanese her family had hired?
3. What is the importance of community to men and women in this book? Mary has the courage of her convictions and the love of her family, so why does she still care what other people think? Do you think she's right to care?
4. Mary Stroud didn't want the inmates of Tallgrass working on her farm. Why did she change her mind?
5. There are two funerals in Tallgrass: Susan Reddick's and Harry Hirano. How are they similar? How are they different? How do they each change Rennie's view of the Japanese and her town?
6. In the 1940s, it was taken for granted that men acted and women talked. How much complicity do women have in the actions of their men: Mrs. Smith in her husband's late-night raid on Tallgrass; Mrs. Snow in her husband's descent into addiction and his treatment of her and Betty Joyce; Mrs. Reddick in her husband's refusal to acknowledge Helen? Why do you think that Mary Stroud broke through the convention to confront the men outside Tallgrass?
7. Why were Americans so frightened of Japanese-Americans during World War II—more than the German- and Italian-Americans? In her acknowledgements, Sandra Dallas mentions that she was inspired to write this book, in part, by the prison camp in Guantanamo Bay. What parallels do you see between them? What differences?
8. Did you recognize any characters from Sandra's other books in Tallgrass?

Courtesy of Reading Group Guides