

## Book Club Discussion Guide



*Fire Weather by John Vaillant, Page 1 (March 2024)*

# Fire weather: the making of a beast

By John Vaillant

## About the author:

JOHN VAILLANT's acclaimed, award-winning nonfiction books, *The Golden Spruce* and *The Tiger*, were national bestsellers. His debut novel, *The Jaguar's Children*, was a finalist for the Rogers Writers' Trust Fiction Prize and the International Dublin Literary Award. Vaillant has received the Governor General's Literary Award, British Columbia's National Award for Canadian Non-Fiction, the Windham-Campbell Literature Prize, and the Pearson Writers' Trust Prize for Nonfiction. He has written for, among others, *The New Yorker*, *The Atlantic*, *National Geographic*, and *The Walrus*. He lives in Vancouver.

Source: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/authors/58679/john-vaillant>

## About this book:

In May 2016, Fort McMurray, the hub of Canada's petroleum industry and America's biggest foreign supplier, was overrun by wildfire. The multi-billion-dollar disaster melted vehicles, turned entire neighborhoods into firebombs, and drove 88,000 people from their homes in a single afternoon. Through the lens of this apocalyptic conflagration—the wildfire equivalent of Hurricane Katrina—John Vaillant warns that this was not a unique event but a shocking preview of what we must prepare for in a hotter, more flammable world.

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For hundreds of millennia, fire has been a partner in our evolution, shaping culture, civilization, and, very likely, our brains. Fire has enabled us to cook our food, defend and heat our homes, and power the machines that drive our titanic economy. Yet this volatile energy source has always threatened to elude our control, and in our new age of intensifying climate change, we are seeing its destructive power unleashed in previously unimaginable ways.

With masterly prose and a cinematic eye, Vaillant takes us on a riveting journey through the intertwined histories of North America's oil industry and the birth of climate science, to the unprecedented devastation wrought by modern forest fires, and into lives forever changed by these disasters. John Vaillant's urgent work is a book for—and from—our new century of fire, which has only just begun.

Source: <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.ca/books/739360/fire-weather-by-john-vaillant/9780735273160>

### Discussion Questions:

1. Wildfires have been in the news a lot in recent years - was there anything that surprised you about how and why they have become more frequent?
2. What was the main message or lesson of this book? Has it inspired you to take any action or make any changes in your life? What are some specific steps or strategies that you will use?
3. Were you surprised to learn about the multiple scientists who warned governments and oil and gas multinationals of the near-certain climate change humans would cause by continuing to burn fossil fuels, and how they were ignored? Why or why not?

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4. What are the three (3) most useful or valuable things you learned from reading this book?
5. There were many personal, true stories from survivors and firefighters who were in Fort McMurray during the 2016 fires. Which of them stood out most to you?
6. One personal story told was about a man who would not leave his home during the evacuation. Why do you think he wouldn't leave? Would you leave if you were in his situation?
7. Many people struggled with what to pack when the evacuation order finally came - what is one thing you would have packed, and why?
8. The book has been described as a “gripping narrative and a loud wake-up call.” What questions do you still have after reading this book? What would you like to learn more about?
9. The headline on an article in The Tye reads “When John Vaillant Contemplates Catastrophe, We Should Listen.” Do you feel like anyone is listening? What will you do to make people listen?

Source: <https://forestofreading.com/fire-weather-2/>