Rochester Reads 2021

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS

INDIGENOUS WISDOM, SCIENTIFIC KNOWLEDGE, AND THE TEACHINGS OF PLANTS

ROBIN WALL KIMMERER

A Reader’s Guide & Calendar of Events
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Writers & Books promotes reading and writing as lifelong activities for people of all ages and backgrounds to enrich their lives and the intellectual, social, and cultural vibrancy of their communities.

VALUES
We believe in the power and importance of the written word; in celebrating the written word as a tool for communication and an art form; that storytelling is a vital aspect of the human experience that unites humanity; that reading builds empathy and brings people together; and in creating a safe space for voices of all backgrounds, beliefs, origins, and abilities.

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“It is the way [Kimmerer] captures beauty that I love the most—the images of giant cedars and wild strawberries, a forest in the rain and a meadow of fragrant sweetgrass will stay with you long after you read the last page.”

—Jane Goodall

Dear Reader,

In 2001, Writers & Books launched “If All of Rochester Read the Same Book...” with Ernest Gaines’ award-winning novel A Lesson before Dying. Renamed “Rochester Reads” in 2015, the program has become a city-wide tradition, throughout the years inspiring readers to deepen self-understanding, engage thoughtfully with important issues, and connect with one another through the shared experience of literature.

This year, we are honored to showcase botanist Robin Wall Kimmerer’s Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants (Milkweed Editions, 2013). Jane Goodall calls this New York Times bestselling collection of essays “an extraordinary book, showing how the factual, objective approach of science can be enriched by the ancient knowledge of the indigenous people.” Onondaga Nation Faithkeeper Oren Lyons observes, “Braiding Sweetgrass is instructive poetry. Robin Wall Kimmerer has put the spiritual relationship that Chief Seattle called the ‘web of life’ into writing.”

Writers & Books and our community partners will host Dr. Kimmerer for two appearances: at the Central Library in downtown Rochester on October 20 at 12 noon for a reading and book signing and on the campus of SUNY Brockport at 7:30 pm for a keynote and second signing. Both events will be streamed live.

September 22 - November 9, readers from around the region will join discussions about Braiding Sweetgrass and the concerns it raises; meet authors and artists; and attend film screenings, readings, presentations, lectures, and special events. To learn more, please browse our Calendar of Events on pages 25-28 and at www.wab.org.

You also are encouraged to peruse this Reader’s Guide for insights into Dr. Kimmerer’s enriching and affecting essays, tips to jumpstart book discussions, and other valuable resources. We invite you to join the conversation as we explore Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants.

Karen (Ren) vanMeenen
Director of Community Reading Programs
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At SUNY College of Environmental Science and Forestry, Dr. Kimmerer is a distinguished teaching professor of Environmental Biology, as well as the founder and director of the Center for Native Peoples and the Environment, whose mission is to create programs that draw on the wisdom of both indigenous and scientific knowledge for our shared goals of sustainability. She tours widely and has been featured on NPR’s On Being Project, and in 2015, addressed the general assembly of the United Nations on the topic of healing our relationship with nature.

As a writer and a scientist, Kimmerer’s interests in restoration include not only restoration of ecological communities, but restoration of our relationships to land. She lives on an old farm in upstate New York, tending gardens both cultivated and wild.
Santee Frazier

Santee Frazier is the author of the poetry collections *Aurum*, praised by Terrance Hayes as “a trove of sensations,” and *Dark Thirty*, called “visceral, immediate, and memorable” by Arthur Sze. His honors include a 2009 Lannan Residency Fellowship and the 2001 Truman Capote Scholarship from the Institute of American Indian Arts Creative Writing Program.

A citizen of the Cherokee Nation of Oklahoma, Mr. Frazier’s poetry collections offer non-romanticized, realistic portraits of great beauty, and a rare look at the truths of survival for Native peoples in today’s society. Mr. Frazier is Visiting Faculty, 2021-2022, at the MFA for Poets & Writers, College of Humanities, University of Massachusetts Amherst.

“In language infused with the attitude of blues—never nostalgic or self-pitying—Frazier explores the harsh lives of people living at the margins with a measure of tenderness that underscores their dignity. The poems handle tough subjects gracefully, moving thematically from issues of sexual exploitation and violence in everyday domestic life to a kind of wonder at the redemptive possibilities of the human spirit rising out of chaos.” (Former United States Poet Laureate Natasha Trethewey)

Angelique Stevens

Angelique Stevens, Haudenosaunee, lives in Upstate New York, where she teaches creative writing, literature of genocide, and race literatures. Her nonfiction can be found in *LitHub, The New England Review, The Chattahoochee Review,* and a number of anthologies. Her essay “Ghost Bread” won the Prism International Creative Nonfiction Contest; she won the grand prize for the Solas Award in 2019; and her essay “Remember the Earth” was published in *Booth 13: Nonfiction Prize Issue,* a special issue selected as a Notable in *The Best American Essays 2020.* She is currently writing a memoir about her experiences growing up in New York State. A member of the Board of Directors of Water for South Sudan, she finds her inspiration in wandering—being in places that push the boundaries of comfort, experience, knowledge, and hunger.
**Discussion Points**

“Be as the berries...”

**The Author’s Craft**

- What does Kimmerer’s dedication, with its reference to “the Keepers of the Fire,” as well as different generations and “this beautiful place,” tell the reader?

- A preface is often used to establish the setting of a book or focus the reader on symbolism or major themes that will be explored. In her preface to *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer uses second person to speak to the reader and asks them to hold out their hands and receive a gift of sweetgrass, sharing that “in our language it is called wiingaashk, the sweet-smelling hair of Mother Earth.” When you breathe in the scent of the “fragrant, holy grass,” she tells us, “you start to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten.” How does this intimate approach inform the reader about what is to come and how they might navigate the text?

- Why does Kimmerer begin the book with the Iroquois story of “Skywoman Falling” and the creation of Turtle Island? How does she contrast this origin story with that of the Christian biblical story of Eve? How does this set the tone for the overarching story of the book?

- The author structures the book in five sections (with more than thirty chapters in total), each section framing an aspect of working with sweetgrass (Planting, Tending, Picking, Braiding, Burning), and each with its own short epigraph-like introductory paragraph. What are the distinct characteristics of each section? Why do you think the author made this structural choice?

- Explore the difference in tone or content between the five sections and among a few of the book’s chapters. Is there a pattern in terms of presenting information vs. story?

- What indigenous myths and origin stories does the author share, and how do they forward the narrative?

- How do the fantastical scenes, such as with Nanabozho or the Windigo, function in the narrative?
Discussion Points Continued

• In her book *Queen of the Fall: A Memoir of Girls and Goddesses*, Sonja Livingston writes about one of her mentors, author and educator Judith Kitchen. Livingston asks about Kitchen’s writing, “What to do with such language? What to do but take it in a line at a time, stopping now and again for breath? What to do but swallow it whole, until saplings take root?” Identify examples of where Kimmerer’s language or story makes you “stop now and again for breath.” What sentences or concepts make you want to “swallow [them] whole, until saplings take root?”

• Explore the author’s writing style, including sentence structure, diction, tone, setting, and narrative structure. Discuss how the writing is imagistic or visual. In what ways is it cinematic?

• Find and explore some of the numerous examples of figurative language (such as metaphor) used by the author.

• Naming is an important aspect of Kimmerer’s training in botany, ranging from Latin nomenclature to common nicknames. Explore some of those names and naming protocols, especially as the author explains the modern conventions in the Note at the end of the book. How has naming been important in your life?

• Kimmerer is careful with her language as a writer and precise with her taxonomic terminology as a scientist. But as an environmentalist, as a human who exemplifies gratitude toward the earth and all its beings, she also refers to non-humans using the pronoun “who” and capitalizes entities such as “Maple.” What is the effect of employing such a humanizing approach in speaking about the world?

• Kimmerer cites several authors and books as influences (“Sources”) at the end of the book. Also, this Reader’s Guide includes a longer list of Recommended Reading. Referencing those titles with which you are familiar, discuss how those influences might be evident in the book. How does the book differ from other nonfiction books you have read?

• Kimmerer shares, “I am a listener and have been listening to stories told around me for longer than I care to admit.” How does this skill assist her in telling the tale(s) she does in *Braiding Sweetgrass*?

Characters/Subjects and Motivation

• Even nonfiction narratives contain subjects we can call “characters” or “protagonists.” This holds true in this book (although, fittingly, there are very few singular characters). Who are the main characters in *Braiding Sweetgrass*?
• An important aspect of learning the “grammar of animacy,” as Kimmerer calls it, of enacting that kind of reciprocal dialogue with the natural world, is experiencing it first-hand, and not just being able to name its elements. Think of a time when you learned more than just the conventional label of a plant or a tree. In what other ways did you experience it and what was the effect? Was it perhaps more long-lasting and meaningful?

• How is the author changed by the individuals (human and non-human) she interacts with, the experiences she has? What lessons does she learn? How does the author reconsider her life, her choices, thoughts about the past and the future? Track her emotional and psychological shifts.

• Numerous expressions of love and connection are explored throughout the book. Discuss one or two that most resonate with you and/or your own experience.

• How does the author weave in the lives of her own children, her own experiences as a mother (to humans)?

• The book offers tales of the author’s ancestors. How do those stories bear on her present, especially in terms of land and language?

• Kimmerer is an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation. Is there a tradition that you identify with and what is its connection to land?

• In “A Mother’s Work,” the author describes the painstaking efforts she took over a long period of time to nurse the pond behind her house back to life. This perseverance is also evident in the story of her efforts to gather maple sap and create syrup, a labor- and time-intensive process. What keeps her going in both instances? What does that tell us about Kimmerer? Have you ever been so determined to complete a project anything like this?

Topics and Themes

• What idea from Braiding Sweetgrass resonated the most with you (the gift economy, the practice of reciprocity, practicing gratitude, etc.)? Why?

• Gratitude is a major topic of Braiding Sweetgrass, one that the author weaves through nearly every chapter. In one essay, she digs deeply into the Thanksgiving Address as “the credo for a culture of gratitude” and which some Onondaga school children recite weekly. How does this compare to such non-indigenous rituals as the Pledge of Allegiance? What would your own Thanksgiving Address look like?

• How is the element of discovery revealed through Kimmerer’s experiences (as a student, as scientist, as an educator, as an explorer)?
Discussion Points Continued

• What different kinds of friendships and familial relationships are portrayed?

• Discuss how place and home (in various manifestations, geographic and otherwise) play important roles in Kimmerer’s story.

• What does the book say about the importance of storytelling? About telling your own story?

• Kimmerer details the many ways non-human beings can teach humans. Trace one or two plant beings discussed in the book and the lessons they offer.

• Some of the “non-human relatives” in Braiding Sweetgrass have entire chapters devoted to them. Two particular plants that we learn a great deal about are sweetgrass and cattails. What other “more-than-human relative” intrigued you? Even amazed you? Which do you want to know more about? Asters? Goldenrod? Strawberries? Water lilies? Witch hazel? Maple? Moss? Salamanders? Lichen?

• In a May 2020 interview with The Guardian, Kimmerer said, “I want to help [plants] become visible to people. People can’t understand the world as a gift unless someone shows them how it’s a gift.” In what distinct ways is this evident in the book?

• Humans are learning more about the community of non-human beings, such as trees that “speak” to one another and reach out to share with others of their kind in need (see especially the work of forest ecologist Suzanne Simard). What can we learn from them? How does this knowledge change how you look at forests, for example? Or a tree in your backyard (perhaps one you planted)?

• What is the importance of the Three Sisters (corn, beans, squash)? What do they each bring to this joining?

• How do the gift economy and reciprocity differ from the capitalistic property economy and the scarcity mindset, in theory and in practice? How does Kimmerer suggest we can best proceed toward a gift economy?

• Kimmerer writes of the “moral covenant of reciprocity.” How do you see this working (or not) in your life, in our shared world?
Kimmerer is an advocate for Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK), an approach she describes as a “way of knowing.” TEK relates to indigenous and other traditional knowledge of local resources and is a scientific approach based on long-term empirical observations. It also involves spiritual, emotional, physical, and mental connections to the environment. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer describes how this approach has long been marginalized by the standard scientific community. Kimmerer even asks, “Does science allow us to perceive the sacred in the world or does it bend light in such a way as to obscure it?” Explore how both Kimmerer and many of her female graduate students have transcended that myopic scientific method to incorporate both evidence-based hard science and spirit.

• Ceremony is a way to remember to remember, Kimmerer tells us. What ceremonies have you experienced in your life? What ceremonies are a part of your family history or your present?

• What is the effect of a language whose focus is on verbs, such as Potawatomi, compared to the more static, noun-heavy mood of English?

• Kimmerer speculates that grief can be a doorway to love. How have you grieved your way to love?

• Essentially, Kimmerer is advocating for plants’ rights. What are your feelings on this issue?

**Connecting to Country and the World**

• Immigration is a hot-button issue in the United States. After relating the origin story, Kimmerer points out that Skywoman was an immigrant. How does this multi-layered concept of immigration, indigeneity, and naturalization and home come into play in *Braiding Sweetgrass*?

• How did your view of the land (e.g., its history, human history on it, the future of the earth) change after reading this book?

• How does *Braiding Sweetgrass* contribute to contemporary narratives of climate change and how humans might approach this pressing threat?

• In one scene in the book, Kimmerer asks her students to think of beneficial relationships between humans and the environment—but most of them cannot think of any. What examples of such mutual beneficence can you think of (in your near vicinity or beyond)? Might people in other parts of the world find it easier to identify such reciprocal scenarios?
Discussion Points Continued

• Studies show that people in the U.S. move (house) an average of 11 times in their lifetime. How might that affect how they see the land?

• One of the final stories Kimmerer relates is that of the industrial poisoning of Onondaga Lake. If you are familiar with Onondaga Lake, what is your experience of it? What other locations near and/or dear to you have suffered a similar fate due to human action or inaction?

• In a recent interview in The Believer, Kimmerer spoke of mosses and how they stick close to home. She made the analogy of humans during a pandemic being able to explore their own sense of philopatry (the tendency to stay home, or to return to one’s home, or even the love of home), saying “By staying home, people and mosses are able to engage in reciprocal relationships with place. That place is taking care of you, but in order for that to happen, you have to take care of that place, which mosses do, and which people can do when they are rooted in place.” How have you experienced this during the pandemic? How can you use this time to pause, to practice patience (with yourself and others)?

• Kimmerer has stated elsewhere that “The rise of feminist voices and leadership in the tradition of conventional male leadership has made ecological justice a feminist issue.” What is your response and how might we see this playing out now or in the (near) future?

• The book ends with the lines: “Whatever our gift, we are called to give it and to dance for the renewal of the world. In return for the privilege of breath.” What does this mean for you? Does it have particular resonance in 2020-21, with a global airborne pandemic, increasingly frequent and destructive wildfires, and palpable climate change?

Speculative Questions for Discussion or Writing

• What do you think the author’s specific motivations were in writing this book? What does she hope for?

• Would this story affect those who grew up in the US differently compared to those who grew up elsewhere? Older readers differently from people from a younger generation? Indigenous people compared to white Americans or immigrants of color? In what ways?

• The author cites a lack of connection to the earth as the reason so many humans do not take care of it, do not live in harmony with it. How can that cycle be broken?
Discussion Points Continued

- How do stories function in a society and for the individual? What are the purposes of telling and retelling stories to ourselves and to others?

- In the chapter “Sitting in a Circle,” the author describes a trip to a marsh with her students during which they learn the myriad uses for the humble cattail. What are those uses? How does that put your own reduce, re-use, recycle practices into perspective?

- In “The Honorable Harvest,” Kimmerer writes, “Cautionary stories of the consequences of taking too much are ubiquitous in Native cultures, but it’s hard to recall a single one in English. Perhaps this helps to explain why we seem to be caught in a trap of overconsumption, which is as destructive to ourselves as to those we consume.” Can you think of any such tales in English? Can you write one?

- How can you move forward seeing the land as teacher, the land as healer?

- After experiencing Braiding Sweetgrass, have you started “to remember things you didn’t know you’d forgotten”?

Related Writing Projects

- Write about your own family origin story. Make sure to include details about the land, the ecosystem you came from, what you connected with most deeply, perhaps what you miss...

- Write about your own childhood or coming-of-age experience in relation to the land, the outdoors. What particular events or feelings have stayed with you?

- Write a 10-minute memoir of your life, focusing on the major events related to connecting with the land, animals, or plant beings.

- Outline the research that you would engage in to continue telling your own life-land story in an effort to get the details right.

- Then set a timer and spend an hour fleshing out some of the details.

- If you were to conduct a tour of your environment as Kimmerer imagines of the Onondaga Lake shore in Syracuse, what sights and “non-human relatives” would you include? Who would you invite?

- In her capacity as a scientist and educator, Kimmerer serves as a mentor to young researchers and shares some of those stories in the book. Write about a teacher or mentor (especially a woman) who has influenced you.
Discussion Points Continued

- Kimmerer’s personal story is couched in larger issues, such as land use and abuse, climate change, reciprocity, gratitude, identity, history, legacy, and paying it forward. Write a first-person (creative nonfiction) essay connecting an element of your own history or contemporary life or thought to an issue in a broader social or cultural context.

- Write about a time you listened to a non-human being, or as Kimmerer sometimes phrases it, a “more-than-human relative.”

- Write about what is in your bundle—what tool, song, word, ceremony, ritual, or dance do you carry?

- Indigenous tradition suggests that we all carry a piece of the sacred fire within us. How do you care for yours?

For Future Consideration and Action

- How does Kimmerer express the idea of ecological compassion and how can you engage in the practice?

- Is reciprocity synonymous with sustainability? What are the differences? How can Kimmerer’s stories inform current efforts toward sustainability? How can her words help foster environmental social justice?

- How might you put into practice the idea of letting the earth be your teacher (instead of being an object of study)?

- Kimmerer asks, “Are we not bound to heal the wounds that we inflict?” Have you ever stopped to help a small animal on or near a road (as Kimmerer narrates her family’s efforts to assist migrating salamanders on a rainy night in “Collateral Damage”)? How might you in the future?

- Kimmerer writes that humans have the gift of language. How do you use that gift? What other gifts do you have? How do you use them?

- The author focuses on the earth’s plenty, on the gifts all around us. The past almost two years have been a time of strife and grief and fear for many. How do we feel and express gratitude for this bounty while honoring our struggles?

- Look to the book’s Epilogue, “Returning the Gift,” in which Kimmerer discusses the circle of reciprocity. How can you engage in reciprocity with the land?

- How might you become a better listener—to all who speak to you?
Discussion Points Continued

• The Windigo is a legendary monster from the Anishinaabe tradition. Kimmerer describes Windigo disease as resulting from the unraveling of the unity of mind, body, and spirit that makes us whole. This unity is represented by the braiding of sweetgrass, the thread of this book. How can we overcome this rupturing, how can we heal?

• There is a sense that “environmentalism becomes synonymous with dire predictions and powerless feelings.” How can you and your/our community overcome those stifling feelings in order to move together toward change?

• In an interview, Kimmerer offered that she feels as if “we are the dream of our ancestors.” She goes on to say that she grieves the suffering of her ancestors (the experience of children being taken from families and forced into boarding schools is just one example) but also the future that her descendants might inherit and this spurs her to act. How does that sentiment spur you to act?

• “Becoming Indigenous to a place means living as if your children’s future mattered, to take care of the land as if our lives, both material and spiritual, depended on it,” Kimmerer writes. How can you go forward, acting as if you were indigenous to a place?

• Kimmerer writes of the prophecy of a crossroads and the choice humans walking on the earth must make. One path reflects respect and reciprocity, connection, and life. She tells us we are the prophesied People of the Seventh Fire who must choose which path to follow—one where the earth is soft and green or one where it is scorched and black. Joanna Macy, an environmental activist; author; and a scholar of Buddhism, general systems theory, and deep ecology, speaks hopefully of The Great Turning, a shift from industrial growth society to a more sustainable civilization. Consider how we can light the Eighth Fire, the fire of peace and brotherhood, which will sustain all life on earth.

“All flourishing is mutual...”
Reading Critically

Good books for discussion move us and stay in our minds long after the book is read and the discussion is over. These books can be enjoyed more than once, and with every rereading, we learn something new.

Reading for a book discussion—whether you are the facilitator or a participant—differs from reading purely for pleasure. As you read, ask questions and mark down important passages or pages you might want to refer to later. Make notes and ask such questions as, “Is this significant?” or “Why does the author include this?” or “How does this relate to previous elements of the narrative?” Making notes as you go may slow down your reading, but the process gives you a better sense of what the book is really about and saves you time in searching out important passages later.

Obviously, asking questions as you read means you don’t know the answers yet, and often you never do discover the answers. But during the discussion of your questions, others in the group may provide insights. Don’t be afraid to ask hard questions because frequently the author is presenting difficult issues for that very purpose.

As with any skill, good literary consciousness grows with practice. You can never relax your vigilance—an author as accomplished as Robin Wall Kimmerer, for example, uses every word to tell the reader something. Try to be aware of what authors are revealing about themselves and what they want you to learn about life from their perspective. Appreciate the artistic presentation, but also reap the benefits of the experience the author is sharing.

As you read Braiding Sweetgrass, consider the questions and topics raised in the Reader’s Guide. What timeless topics does the author raise? How are some of these issues addressed in the book? How do these issues relate to your own family, your own experience, or your own hopes and fears? These are the kinds of questions that lead to in-depth conversations with your group and make the book meaningful and of lasting value.

Another way to analyze the important themes of a book is to consider the author’s process. You can imagine an author mulling over the beginnings of the story, asking “What if...” questions. Think about which “What ifs” prompted the story of Braiding Sweetgrass.

When you meet the “characters” in the book (in this case, real people as well as non-human beings), place yourself at the scene. Think of them as you do the people around you. Think about their perspectives, their motives, and perhaps their
Tips for Book Discussions Continued

potential shortcomings. What would it be like to interact with them? Listen to the tone and style of their speech and to their stories. Read portions aloud.

Sometimes an author uses the structure of the book to illustrate an important concept or to create a mood. Notice how the author structured the book. Are the stories or chapters or essays prefaced by quotes or titles? How do they apply to the content of the sections? How many narrators tell the story? Who are they? How does the sequence of events unfold to create the mood of the story? Does it make sense?

Compare the book to others by the same author (in this case, Robin Wall Kimmerer’s 2013 book Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses) or to books by different authors that have a similar topic or style or explore the same era or events/situations (see the Recommended Reading list for Braiding Sweetgrass, which includes such books as Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest by Suzanne Simard and How Women, Trees, and Tree People Can Save the Planet by Jean Shinoda Bolen as well as several titles by ecologist Peter Wohlleben). Often, themes run through an author’s works that are more fully realized by comparison. Comparing one author’s work with another’s can help you solidify your opinions, as well as define for you qualities you might otherwise miss.

The most successful books are those that insinuate themselves into your experience: they reveal an important truth or provide a profound sense of kinship between the reader and the writer. Searching for, identifying, and discussing these truths often make the book more significant. This is perhaps especially true in relation to Robin Wall Kimmerer and Braiding Sweetgrass.

Asking questions, reading carefully, imagining yourself in the story, analyzing style and structure, and searching for personal meaning in a work of literature all enhance the text’s value and the discussion potential for your group.

The Discussion

As facilitator, come prepared with 10 to 15 open-ended questions. Questions that can be answered “yes” or “no” tend to cut off discussion.

Questions should be used to guide the discussion and keep it on track, but be ready to let the discussion flow naturally. You’ll often find that the questions you’ve prepared will come up naturally as part of the discussion.

Remind participants that there are not necessarily any right answers to the questions posed.
Tips for Book Discussions Continued

Don’t be afraid to criticize a book, but try to get the group to go beyond the “It just didn’t appeal to me” statement. What was it about the book that made it unappealing? The style? The pacing? The characters? Has the author written other books that were better? Did it remind you of a book that you liked or disliked? Many times the best discussions are about books that the majority of the group disliked.

Try to keep a balance in the discussion between personal revelations and reactions and a response to the book itself. Every reader responds to a book in ways that are intimately tied to their own background, upbringing, and worldview. A book about senseless violence, for example, will naturally strike some sort of chord in a reader whose family member was a target of such violence. That’s interesting, but what’s more interesting is how the author chose to present the incident, or the author’s attitude toward the perpetrator and the victim. It is often too easy to let a group drown in reminiscences when a narrative is personally resonant for one or more members.

Some Suggestions for Participants

A good discussion depends partly on the skills we develop as participants. Here are some suggestions (based on the New York Public Library’s book discussion program):

SPEAK UP. Group discussion is like a conversation; everyone takes part in it. Each speaker responds to what the person before them said. Nobody should prepare a speech; ideally there will be a spontaneous exchange of ideas and opinions. The discussion is your chance to say what you think.

LISTEN. Try to understand the other person’s point of view; see what experience and thinking it developed from. Don’t accept ideas that don’t have a sound basis. Remember, there are several points of view possible on every question.

BE BRIEF. Share the discussion with others. Speak for only a few minutes at a time. Make your point in as few words as possible—this is more effective for a group discussion. Be ready to let someone else speak. A good discussion keeps everyone in the conversation.

SHARE YOUR VIEWPOINT AND EXPERIENCE. Don’t expect to be called on to speak; respectfully enter into the discussion with your comment of agreement or disagreement or your question when appropriate. When you find yourself disagreeing with other people’s interpretations or opinions, say so and tell why, in a friendly way. Considering all points of view is important to group discussions.

COME WITH YOUR OWN QUESTIONS IN MIND. As you read the selection, make note of the points on which you’d like to hear the comments of other group members.
Recommended Reading

See *Braiding Sweetgrass*, “Sources,” pages 387-8

**NONFICTION**

*Nature Writing/Natural Science/Botany/Ecology/Ecopsychology/Climate/Gardening*

- *Active Hope: How to Face the Mess We’re in without Going Crazy* (2012) by Joanna Macy
- *All We Can Save: Truth, Courage and Solutions for the Climate Crisis* (2020) by Ayana Elizabeth Johnson and Katharine J. Wilkinson, eds.
- *An American Childhood* (1987) by Annie Dillard
- *Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life* (2007) by Barbara Kingsolver
- *Arctic Dreams* (1986) by Barry Lopez
- *Around the World in 80 Trees* (2018) by Jonathan Drori (author) and Lucille Clerc (illustrator)
- *Being a Beast: Adventures Across the Species Divide* (2016) by Charles Foster
- *Confessions of a Recovering Environmentalist and Other Essays* (2017) by Paul Kingsnorth
- *Crossing Open Ground* (1988) by Barry Lopez
- *Desert Solitaire: A Season in the Wilderness* (1968) by Edward Abbey
Recommended Reading Continued

Finding Beauty in a Broken World (2008) by Terry Tempest Williams
Finding the Mother Tree: Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest (2021) by Suzanne Simard
The Forest Unseen: A Year’s Watch in Nature (2012) by David Haskell
From Where We Stand: Recovering a Sense of Place (1993) by Deborah Tall (focus on the Finger Lakes)
Gathering Moss: A Natural and Cultural History of Mosses (2003) by Robin Wall Kimmerer
H is for Hawk (2014) by Helen Macdonald (memoir)
The Heartbeat of Trees: Embracing Our Ancient Bond with Forests and Nature (2021) by Peter Wohlleben
The Hidden Life of Trees: What They Feel, How They Communicate—Discoveries from A Secret World (2016) by Peter Wohlleben
The Home Place: Memoirs of a Colored Man’s Love Affair with Nature (2016) by J. Drew Lanham (memoir)
How I Became a Tree (2021) by Sumana Roy
How Women, Trees, and Tree People Can Save the Planet (2011) by Jean Shinoda Bolen
The Humane Gardener: Nurturing a Backyard Habitat for Wildlife (How to Create a Sustainable and Ethical Garden that Promotes Native Wildlife, Plants, and Biodiversity) (2017) by Nancy Lawson
The Inner Life of Animals: Love, Grief, and Compassion—Surprising Observations of a Hidden World (2017) by Peter Wohlleben
Interdependence: Biology and Beyond (2015) by Kriti Sharma
Madder: A Memoir in Weeds (2021) by Marco Wilkinson (memoir)
The Master and His Emissary: The Divided Brain and the Making of the Western World (2019) by Iain McGilchrist
Moral Ground: Ethical Action for a Planet in Peril (2010) by Kathleen Dean Moore, ed.
Nature (1836) by Ralph Waldo Emerson
Of Wolves and Men (1978; 2003 updated version) by Barry Lopez
Old Growth: The Best Writing about Trees from Orion Magazine (2021), with a foreword by Robin Wall Kimmerer
The Old Ways: A Journey on Foot (2012) by Robert Macfarlane
Orwell’s Roses (2021) by Rebecca Solnit
Our Biggest Experiment: An Epic History of the Climate Crisis (2021) by Alice Bell
The Peregrine (1967) by J.A. Baker
Pilgrim at Tinker Creek (1974) by Annie Dillard
Recommended Reading Continued

- Queen of the Fall: “Introduction: The Memory of Trees” (2015) by Sonja Livingston
- Refuge: An Unnatural History of Family and Place (1991) by Terry Tempest Williams
- A Sand County Almanac: And Sketches Here and There (1949) by Aldo Leopold
- Seed to Dust: Life, Nature, and a Country Garden (2021) by Marc Hamer
- The Sense of Wonder (1955) by Rachel Carson
- Silent Spring (1962) by Rachel Carson
- The Solace of Open Spaces (1985) by Gretel Ehrlich
- The Songs of Trees: Stories from Nature’s Great Connectors (2017) by David Haskell
- Space and Place: The Perspective of Experience (1977) by Yi-Fu Tuan
- The Stubborn Light of Things: A Nature Diary (2021) by Melissa Harrison
- The Tangled Tree: A Radical New History of Life (2018) by David Quammen
- Teaching a Stone to Talk (1982) by Annie Dillard
- Tending the Wild: Native American Knowledge and the Management of California’s Natural Resources (2005) by Kat Anderson
- This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. the Climate (2014) by Naomi Klein
- Totem Salmon: Life Lessons from Another Species (1999) by Freeman House
- Trace: Memory, History, Race, and the American Landscape (2016) by Lauret Savoy
- The Tree Where Man Was Born (1972) by Peter Matthiesen
- The Unsettling of America: Culture & Agriculture (1977) by Wendell Berry
- Unsolaced: Along the Way to All That Is (2021) by Gretel Ehrlich
- Vesper Flights (2020) by Helen Macdonald
- The View from Lazy Point: A Natural Year in an Unnatural World (2010) by Carl Safina
- Walden (1854) by Henry David Thoreau
- Walking on Lava: Selected Works for Uncivilised Times (2017) by The Dark Mountain Project
- When Women Were Birds: Fifty-Four Variations on Voice (2012): by Terry Tempest Williams
- Why Fish Don’t Exist: A Story of Loss, Love and the Hidden Order of Life (2020) by Lulu Miller
Recommended Reading Continued

A Wild Love for the World: Joanna Macy and the Work of Our Time (2020) by
   Joanna Macy and Stephanie Kaza
Wild Spectacle: Seeking Wonders in a World beyond Humans (2021) by Janisse Ray
Wild Thoughts from Wild Places (1998) by David Quammen
Wilderness Essays (1980) by John Muir
   Alison Hawthorne Deming

Additional Indigenous History & Contemporary Concerns
Anti-Indianism in Modern America (2001) by Elizabeth Cook-Lynn
As Long as Grass Grows: The Indigenous Fight for Environmental Justice, from
   Colonization to Standing Rock (2019) by Dina Gilio-Whitaker
As We Have Always Done: Indigenous Freedom Through Radical Resistance (2017) by
   Leanne Betasamosake Simpson
Carry: A Memoir of Survival on Stolen Land (2020) by Toni Jensen (memoir)
The Heartbeat of Wounded Knee: Native America from 1890 to the Present (2019) by
   David Treuer
An Indigenous Peoples’ History of the United States (2014) by Roxanne Dunbar-Ortiz
Lakota Woman (1990) by Mary Crow Dog (memoir)
A Mind Spread Out on the Ground (2019) by Alicia Elliott (memoir)
Native American Herbal Apothecary: 3 Books in 1: A complete guide to learn the ancient
   art of Native Americans and the Amazing power of the herbs to improve your wellness
   (2021) by Naira Adahi
Our History Is the Future: Standing Rock Versus the Dakota Access Pipeline, and the
The Pale-Faced Lie: A True Story (2019) by David Crow (memoir)
Poet Warrior (2021) by Joy Harjo (memoir)
The Red Deal: Indigenous Action to Save Our Earth (2021) by The Red Nation
   Vine Deloria
Rez Life: An Indian’s Journey Through Reservation Life (2012) by David Treuer (memoir)
The Sacred Hoop: Recovering the Feminine in American Indian Traditions (1986) by
   Paula Gunn Allen
Recommended Reading Continued

*Savage Dreams: A Journey into the Hidden Wars of the American West* (1994) by Rebecca Solnit
*The Turquoise Ledge* (2010) by Leslie Marmon Silko (memoir)
*World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments* (2020) by Aimee Nezhukumatathil
*You Don’t Have to Say You Love Me* (2017) by Sherman Alexie (memoir)

**FICTION**

**Eco-fiction/Climate Fiction**
   (2015 Rochester Reads selection)
*Annihilation* (2014) by Jeff Vandermeer
*Barkskins* (2016) by Annie Proulx
*Barn 8* (2002) by Deb Olin Unferth
*The Bear* (2020) by Andrew Krivak
*California* (2014) by Edan Lupecki
*A Children’s Bible* (2020) by Lydia Millet
*Clade* (2015) by James Bradley
*Deep River* (2019) by Karl Marlantes
*Drive Your Plow Over the Bones of the Dead* (2009) by Olga Tokarczuk
*Flight Behavior* (2012) by Barbara Kingsolver
*Gold Fame Citrus* (2015) by Claire Vaye Watkins
*Into the Forest* (1996) by Jean Hegland
*Latitude of Longing* (2018) by Shubhangi Swarup
*The Lightest Object in the Universe* (2019) by Kimi Eisele
*Memory of Water* (2012) by Emmi Itäranta
*Migrations* (2020) by Charlotte McConaghy
*Oil on Water* (2010) by Helen Habila
*The Old Drift* (2020) by Namwali Serpell
*The Overstory* (2018) by Richard Powers
Recommended Reading Continued

Parable of the Sower (1993) by Octavia Butler
(Butler’s Kindred was the 2003 Rochester Reads selection)
The Resisters (2020) by Gish Jen
The River (2019) by Peter Heller
The Road (2006) by Cormac McCarthy
Salvage the Bones (2011) by Jesmyn Ward
Stay and Fight (2019) by Madeline Ffitch
A Thousand Acres (1991) by Jane Smiley
The Windup Girl (2009) by Paolo Bacigalupi

Native American and Indigenous Narratives/Connections to the Land
The Bean Trees (1988) by Barbara Kingsolver
Caleb’s Crossing (2011) by Geraldine Brooks
Ceremony (1977) by Leslie Marmon Silko (and several other novels)
Cherokee America (2019) by Margaret Verble
Cheyenne Madonna (2010) by Eddie Chuculate
Crooked Hallelujah (2020) by Kelli Jo Ford
Dovetails in Tall Grass (2021) by Samantha Specks
From the Hilltop (2010) by Toni Jensen (stories)
The Grass Dancer (1994) by Susan Power
Harry’s Trees (2018) by Jon Cohen
The Hiawatha (2019) by David Treuer (and several other novels)
House Made of Dawn (1968) by N. Scott Momaday
Indian Horse (2012) by Richard Wahamese
The Lone Ranger and Tonto Fistfight in Heaven (1993) by
Sherman Alexie (and other story collections)
Love Medicine (1984) by Louise Erdrich (and many more novels, including seven
others in the Love Medicine series, the Justice trilogy, and others)
The Only Good Indians (2020) by Stephen Graham Jones (horror)
Owls Don’t Have to Mean Death (2017) by Chip Livingston
Reservation Blues (1995) by Sherman Alexie
(and several other novels, essays and story collections)
The Road Back to Sweetgrass (2014) by Linda LeGarde Grover
Robopocalypse (2011) by Daniel H. Wilson (science fiction)
Solar Storms (1994) by Linda Hogan
Recommended Reading Continued

Spider Woman’s Granddaughters: Traditional Tales and Contemporary Writing by Native American Women (1989) by Paula Gunn Allen

Stargaze (2021) by Anne Hillerman
   (the latest in the Leaphorn, Chee & Manuelito series)
There There (2018) by Tommy Orange
Trail of Lightning (2018) by Rebecca Roanhorse (fantasy)
Walk Two Moons (1994) by Sharon Creech
Where the Crawdads Sing (2018) by Delia Owens
Where the Dead Sit Talking (2018) by Brandon Hobson
Winter in the Blood (1974) by James Welch (and several other novels)
The Woman Who Owned the Shadows (1983) by Paula Gunn Allen
A Yellow Raft in Blue Water (1987) by Michael Dorris

RECOMMENDED POETS
Sherman Alexie
Jimmy Santiago Baca
Wendell Berry
Sherwin Bitsui
Joseph Bruchac
Allison Adelle Hedge Coke
Natalie Diaz, especially Postcolonial Love Poem (2020)
Deborah Digges
Camille Dungy
Heid E. Erdrich
Jennifer Foerster
Carolyn Forché
Santee Frazier
Ross Gay & Aimee Nezhukumatathil, especially
   Lace and Pyrite: Letters from Two Gardens
Joy Harjo, especially American Sunrise (2019)
Linda Hogan
Kathleen Jamie
Recommended Reading Continued

Joan Naviyuk Kane
Maurice Kenny
Layli Long Soldier, especially WHEREAS (2017)
Adrian C. Louis
W.S. Merwin
N. Scott Momaday
Aimee Nezhukumatathil
Margaret Noodin, especially What the Chickadee Knows
   (poems in Anishinaabemowin & in English)
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Mary Oliver (poetry & essays)
Simon J. Ortiz
Tommy Pico, especially Nature Poem (2017)
Craig Santos Perez, especially [guma’] (2014)
Cheryl Savageau
Cedar Sigo
Edgar Gabriel Silex
Jake Skeets, especially Eyes Bottle Dark with a Mouthful of Flowers (2019)
William Stafford
James Welch
Orlando White
Ray Young Bear

POETRY COLLECTIONS
Recommended Reading Continued

CHILDREN’S & YOUNG ADULT

Fiction
The Absolutely True Diary of a Part-Time Indian (2007) by Sherman Alexie
Firekeeper’s Daughter (2021) by Angeline Boulley
If I Ever Get Out of Here (2013) by Eric Gansworth
The Marrow Thieves (2017) by Cherie Dimaline
Rain Is Not My Indian Name (2001) by Cynthia Leitich Smith
Reservation Blues (1995) by Sherman Alexie
The Sign of the Beaver (1983) by Elizabeth George Speare
Trickster: Native American Tales, A Graphic Collection (2021, 10th Anniversary Ed.) by
  Matt Dembicki
Wishtree (2017) by Katherine Applegate

Nonfiction
Fatty Legs (2010) by Christy Jordan-Fenton and Margaret Pokiak-Fenton
The First Blade of Sweetgrass (2021) by Suzanne Greenlaw and
  Gabriel Frey, Illustrations by Nancy Baker
My Name Is Seepeetza (1992) by Shirley Sterling
Sugar Falls: A Residential School Story (2012) by David Robertson (illustrated)
Rochester Reads Calendar of Events

For registration information, COVID protocols, and more details about events: https://wab.org/rochester-reads-2021-calendar and https://wab.org/upcoming-events/rochester-reads-2/

Wednesday, September 22 | 12-1 pm
Online Brownbag Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Presented by Central Library of Rochester & Monroe County

Thursday, September 30 | 6-7 pm
Online Brownbag Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Hosted by Irondequoit Library

Sunday, October 3 | 3 pm
Screening: Fantastic Fungi (1 hour, 20-minutes, 2019), directed by Louie Schwartzberg
Followed by discussion
The Little Theatre, 240 East Avenue, Rochester

Tuesday, October 5 | 1-2 pm
Robin Kimmerer with Evan Dawson on “Connections”
Rochester: WXXI AM 1370, W298CH FM 107.5, WRUR FM 88.5
Geneva: WEOS FM 89.5

Wednesday, October 6 | 3:15-4 pm
Haudensaunee Storytelling Circle for Children & Their Caregivers, with Ganondagan Historical Interpreters
Mendon Public Library, 22 North Main Street, Honeoye Falls

Wednesday, October 6 | 7-8:30 pm
Reconnecting to Nature by Creating a Healthy Yard: Lessons from Braiding Sweetgrass and Other Wisdom Keepers
Penfield Library, 1985 Baird Road, Penfield

Thursday, October 7 | 7:30-9 pm | 20th ANNIVERSARY KICK-OFF
Award-winning Poet Santee Frazier: Reading, Talk, Conversation, & Signing
ASL Interpreted
Event Sponsor: Bruce & Dana Gianniny
Rochester Academy of Medicine, 1441 East Avenue, Rochester
Rochester Reads Calendar of Events

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Monday, October 11 | 10:30 am
Tour of Wild Hill Farm, Ionia
Sponsored By Mendon Public Library

Monday, October 11 | 7 pm
Screening: Without a Whisper—KONNÓN:KWE (27 minutes, 2020), directed by Katsitsionni Fox
St. John Fisher College, Basil Hall, Room 135, Pittsford

Monday, October 11 | 7-8 pm
Discussion: Native Plants in Our Landscape
Presented by Wood Library, 134 North Main Street, Canandaigua

Tuesday, October 12 | 1–1:30 pm
Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Brighton Memorial Library, 2300 Elmwood Avenue, Brighton

Tuesday, October 12 | 7 pm
In-Person and Online Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Webster Public Library, 980 Ridge Road, Webster

Thursday, October 14 | 11 am
Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Victor Farmington Library, 15 Main Street, Farmington

Thursday, October 14 | 6-7:30 pm
Discussion of Braiding Sweetgrass
Victor Farmington Library, 15 Main Street, Farmington

Thursday, October 14 | Open Studio 6 pm, Event 7 pm
VSW Salon: Artists Read from & Reflect on Passages from Braiding Sweetgrass
Visual Studies Workshop, 31 Prince Street, Rochester
Rochester Reads Calendar of Events

For registration information, COVID protocols, and more details about events: https://wab.org/rochester-reads-2021-calendar and https://wab.org/upcoming_events/rochester-reads-2/

Thursday, October 14 | 7 pm
Online Discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass* and the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer
Thursday, Hosted by Estuary Soul Care

Thursday, October 14 | 7:30-8:15 pm
Novelist Kelli Jo Ford: Virtual Reading & Conversation
Presented by Writers & Books wab.org

Saturday, October 16 | 10:30 am (Rain date: 10/30)
Walking Tour of Washington Grove
Friends of Washington Grove

Sunday, October 17 | 2-3 pm
Iroquois History & Culture with Ganondagon’s Harvey Limbeck/Living with Nature Exhibition
Penfield Library, 1985 Baird Road, Penfield

Tuesday, October 19 | 1-1:30 pm
Online Discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass*
Hosted by Brighton Memorial Library

Tuesday, October 19 | 7 pm
Discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass*
Barnes & Noble, Towne Center, 1070 Ridge Road, Webster

Wednesday, October 20 | 12 pm | FEATURED AUTHOR EVENT
Robin Kimmerer Virtual Reading, Q & A and Book Signing
(In-Person Event at Central Library Sold Out)
Event Sponsor: Friends & Foundation of the Rochester Public Library
ASL Interpreted

Enjoy the live streamed experience at home or at a partnering venue:
Mendon Public Library and Wood Library, Canandaigua.
Each venue will follow its own COVID protocols.
Rochester Reads Calendar of Events

For registration information, COVID protocols, and more details about events: https://wab.org/rochester-reads-2021-calendar and https://wab.org/upcoming-events/rochester-reads-2/

Wednesday, October 20 | 7:30-9 pm | FEATURED AUTHOR EVENT
(In-Person Event at SUNY Brockport Sold Out)
Robin Kimmerer Keynote & Book Signing
Event Sponsor: The College at SUNY Brockport
ASL Interpreted

Enjoy the live streamed experience at home or at St. John Fisher College, Basil Hall 135.

Thursday, October 21 | 7 pm
Online Discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass* and the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer
Hosted by Estuary Soul Care

Monday, October 25 | 6:30-7:30 pm
Family Storyhour and Sweetgrass Activity: *The First Blade of Sweetgrass*, by Suzanne Greenlaw and Gabriel Frey, with illustrations by Nancy Baker
Penfield Library, 1985 Baird Rd, Penfield

Tuesday, October 26 | 7:30-8:15 pm
Memoirist Toni Jensen: Virtual Reading & Conversation
Presented by Writers & Books wab.org

Tuesday, November 2 | 7-8:30 pm
Reciprocating the Gift: Online Panel Discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass* / Q & A
Hosted by Writers & Books wab.org

Saturday, November 6 | 2-4 pm
Screening: *The Doctrine of Discovery: Unmasking the Domination Code* (1 hour, 2014), directed by Sheldon P. Wolfchild, followed by discussion with G. Peter Jemison
Ganondagan Seneca Art & Culture Center, 7000 County Road 41, Victor

Tuesday, November 9 | 7 pm
Book discussion of *Braiding Sweetgrass* with the Tuesday Night Book Club
Henrietta Public Library, 625 Calkins Road, Henrietta

2001: A Lesson Before Dying, by Ernest J. Gaines
2002: The Sweet Hereafter, by Russell Banks
2003: Kindred, by Octavia Butler
2004: Peace Like a River, by Leif Enger
2005: Servants of the Map, by Andrea Barrett
2006: Name All the Animals, by Alison Smith
2007: The Buffalo Soldier, by Chris Bohjalian
2008: Hope and Other Dangerous Pursuits, by Laila Lalami
2009: Jim the Boy, by Tony Earley
2010: Bel Canto, by Ann Patchett
2011: The Good Thief, by Hannah Tinti
2012: The Madonnas of Leningrad, by Debra Dean
2013: Into the Beautiful North, by Luis Alberto Urrea
2014: The Snow Child, by Eowyn Ivey
2015: The Age of Miracles, by Karen Thompson Walker
2016: Queen of the Fall: A Memoir of Girls and Goddesses, by Sonja Livingston
2017: The Enchanted, by Rene Denfeld
2018: The Distance Between Us, by Reyna Grande
2019: American War, by Omar El Akkad
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