

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS¹

DISCUSSION FEBRUARY 4, 2022

Part 1: Planting Sweetgrass (pp. 3 - 59 in Milkweed Editions, 2013)

Read the first six chapters of the book and write short reflections on each of the following

Dr. Kimmerer presents this book as a gift of braided stories "meant to heal our relationship with the world" by weaving together the three strands of "indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of an Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most."

1. In the story, 'Skywoman Falling'--the indigenous Creation story (pp. 3-10), you learn that skywoman lived as if her children's future mattered. If you truly focus on the Earth that will be left for your grandchildren, how would you live differently?
2. Kimmerer states, in Native ways of knowing, human people are often referred to as "the younger brothers of Creation." (p. 9) Do you agree that humans can learn from plants and animals? If so, how can we humble ourselves to 'listen' to the wisdom of the plants?
3. In the 'Council of Pecans' (pp. 11-21), we learn that trees teach the 'Spirit of Community' in which what is good for one is good for all. If you believed that the earth belongs to everybody as a community, would you be more invested in its health? Why?
4. Does the concept of trees having a community relationship, and the scientific explanations of their possible means of communications change how you view our relationship with forests? If so, how?
5. The 'Gift of Strawberries' (pp. 22-32) introduces the reader to the concept of "the essence of a gift economy is, at its root, reciprocity." (p. 28) How can "the relationship of gratitude and reciprocity that has been developed increase the evolutionary fitness of both plant and animal"? (p. 30)
6. Do you see the earth as property or as a gift? How does this perspective change the way in which you view the value of what you take from the earth?
7. 'An Offering' (pp. 33-38) provides insight into Kimmerer's understanding of the meaning of ceremony that is "fed from the same bond with the land, founded on respect and gratitude." (p. 36) How can we express our gratitude and responsibility for the gifts of the land? What can we offer earth in return?
8. 'Asters and Goldenrod' (pp. 39-47) delves into Kimmerer's need to question and to know about the relationship between these flowers. "It was an architecture of relationships, of connections that I yearned to understand." (p. 46) She discovered a "lived reciprocity" between asters and goldenrod—"the pairing of purple and gold". What is the interdependency between humans and plants? And, what happens if we don't live up to our end of the relationship?
9. 'Learning the Grammar of Animacy' (pp. 48-59) introduces the concept of communing with nature by getting to know more about plants and recognizing that they are not inanimate objects. What can you do to start learning about the plants in your immediate environment? If you addressed the plants as something other than 'it', would that change your attitude? How?

¹ From the Longwood Gardens Discussion and Question Guide for [Community Read 2015](https://longwoodgardens.org/education/community-read-2015) (<https://longwoodgardens.org/education/community-read-2015>) in Kennett Square, PA