

BRAIDING SWEETGRASS DISCUSSION QUESTIONS¹

DISCUSSION APRIL 1, 2022

Part 4: Braiding Sweetgrass (pp. 205 - 302 in Milkweed Editions, 2013)

Read chapters eighteen through twenty-six and write reflections on each of the following:

The significance of braiding plaits of sweetgrass into three strands is symbolic of the philosophy and spirituality of the indigenous people. Sweetgrass is a sacred, healing plant to the Potawatomi people and is braided "... as if it were our mother's hair, to show our loving care for her." (p. 263) Kimmerer shares the meaning of becoming indigenous to a place, of how the land is the "real teacher" (p. 222), and the methodology she used with her Ethnobotany students to enlighten them to the fact that "The plants adapt, the people adopt." (p. 229) In addition, she elaborates on the purpose of ceremony and how "... the community creates ceremony and the ceremony creates communities." (p. 250) Preserving the relationship between plants and people through ecological restoration is another example of the need for listening to the plants. Kimmerer states in the 'Umbilicaria: The Belly Button of the World' chapter, "... lichens are born from reciprocity. ... They remind us of the enduring power that rises from mutualism, from the sharing of the gifts carried by each species." (p. 275)

1. In 'Putting Down Roots' (pp. 254 - 267), Kimmerer states, "Losing a plant can threaten a culture in much the same way as losing a language." (p. 261) On the basis of Kimmerer's discussion in this chapter regarding sweetgrass's decline, how can plants repeat the history of their people? (p. 262) What are some examples presented by Kimmerer that would support her statement, "Reciprocity is a key to success."? (p. 262)

2. The chapter, 'Old-Growth Children' (pp. 277 - 292), captures the essence of sustainability and how we can learn from an old-growth forest. What tools do forest ecosystems have for "dealing with massive disturbance ..."? (p. 283) What is the difference between industrial forestry and sustainable forestry? (p. 285) What can we learn from the extermination of old-growth ecosystems in the past and present? What can our role be in the regeneration of these ecosystems? (p. 284)

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