



Braiding Sweetgrass Discussion Guide

Book Summary

In her nonfiction book *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Robin Wall Kimmerer lays out her philosophy regarding humanity's relationship with the earth and how humans can work together to avoid a climate crisis. She draws on knowledge gained from her role as a mother, a scientist, an inheritor of Indigenous wisdom, a decorated professor, and an enrolled member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation in order to highlight humanity's true teachers: the nonhuman beings that have inhabited this world long before humans and will likely inhabit it long after humans are gone.

Themes

Reciprocity, Gratitude, Indigeneity, Reconciliation

Reader Discussion Questions

1. In the essay "The Gift of Strawberries," Kimmerer introduces the reader to the notion of the "gift economy." What are the pros and cons of the gift economy—or, in other words, what do you like or not like about this concept? Do you think you could incorporate the gift economy into your lifestyle? If yes, how would you do this?
2. Kimmerer describes Sweetgrass, "Breathe in its scent... and you start to remember things you didn't know you'd forgotten." What did this book reinforce for you that you already knew, but had perhaps forgotten?
3. How do the "stories we choose to shape our behaviors" have consequences beyond our own lives?
4. Do you think humans can be raised by nature or plants like Kimmerer says she was "in a way raised by strawberries?"
5. Berries are the fruit of summer; nuts are the fruit of winter. Does knowing this change how you will eat in the future? How do you think our consumer culture of having everything available all the time instead of harvesting based on the season has impacted nature and our health?
6. A major theme throughout the book is reciprocity—that humans, the land, and environment depend on each other—and this relationship is sacred. What aspects of your life embrace this theme?
7. Living in the United States we are deeply rooted in Capitalism. Do you think we might be able to change our culture to become more gift oriented? If so, how could we start?

8. What do you think of Kimmerer's observation that English is a noun-based language versus the verb-based language of the Potawatomi?
 9. Kimmerer explains her thoughts on the nature of animate and inanimate things in "Learning the Grammar of Animacy." What was your reaction to this viewpoint that everything is alive? Even if you don't agree, does this idea change how you think about the role plants play in our everyday lives?
 10. In "Epiphany in the Beans," Kimmerer speaks to having a "sense of place," a place where you feel nurtured and supported. If you have a place where you feel "a sense of place," where is it and why do you feel that way when you are there?
 11. If you are a mother or a father, how did you or how will you commemorate your child leaving the nest? Will you celebrate or grieve?
 12. In "The Three Sisters," the story is about how corn, squash, and beans flourish better when they are planted together. How do you look at agricultural methods used by large scale farmers in comparison to traditional native gardening techniques differently after reading this essay? If you have a vegetable garden, will you do anything differently after reading this book?
 13. Why is the world beautiful?
 14. "...the most important things each of us can know is our unique gift and how to use it in the world." How do you feel about this message? Do you know what your unique gift is? How does this individuality fit in a culture that emphasizes the group not the individual?
 15. Are there practical insights from this book that you would like to incorporate into your daily life? What resonated the most with you? E.g., gift economy, reciprocity, gratitude, ceremony of the mundane to the sacred, etc.?
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About Rogue Reads

Rogue Reads is a community reading program designed to promote literacy and intergenerational book-centered discussion and to foster a sense of community by bringing people together through literature. Rogue Reads aims to engage Jackson County residents in dialogue and bring the community together by promoting tolerance and understanding about differing points of view. Rogue Reads is made possible with the support of the Jackson County Library Foundation.

The book selections for 2021-22 include *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer for adults, *The Marrow Thieves* by Cherie Dimaline for teens, *Indian No More* by Charlene Willing McManis for tweens, and *We Are Water Protectors* by Carole Lindstrom, Illustrated by Michaela Goade for children.

Join JCLS for Rogue Reads programming, including a Virtual Author Talk with Robin Wall Kimmerer on Wednesday, February 23 at 5 PM. [Learn more jcls.org/roguereads](https://jcls.org/roguereads).