

Braiding Sweetgrass Reading Guide

1. "Plants tell their stories not by what they say, but by what they do." What was your favorite plant story in this book and what lesson did you learn from it?
2. Is there a plant like the wiingashk that is as special to you or holds value for you? Why?
3. Throughout this book, Kimmerer writes about how her experiences in traditional academic settings has been influenced by her knowledge and Potawatomi heritage. Have you had similar experiences where your background and way of seeing the world clashes with the mainstream way of seeing and thinking?
4. Kimmerer challenges us to see a more positive relationship between people and the environment, like the generosity of geese or the strawberries that nourished her family in time of need. We can shift our focus on the negative impacts of people on the land to opportunities for reciprocity and renewal. What is your knowledge of positive interactions between people and land?
5. Scientific knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing are complimentary. Do you think there is a need for objectivity (science) and subjectivity to come together in order to create a fuller appreciation and understanding of plants, animals, and the natural world?
6. In "The Grammar of Animacy," Kimmerer states that the word 'it' "robs a person of selfhood and kinship, reducing a person to a mere thing." What would change if the English language reflected the animacy of plants and animals?
7. In "A Mother's Work," Kimmerer writes of restoring the pond on her land for her daughters by clearing out algae and many small invertebrates. She says, "I bargained with myself over the chain of responsibility and tried to convince myself their demise served a greater good." What responsibility do we have to restore natural habitats? How would you calculate the cost of destruction vs. creation like Kimmerer?
8. The Three Sisters – corn, beans, and squash – grow and flourish together in harmony. How can we combine our individual strengths to build community and reciprocal relationships?
9. How can people who do not live in close proximity to nature practice concepts that Kimmerer introduces like the Honorable Harvest or reciprocity? What might you incorporate into your life?
10. In "Burning Cascade Head," Kimmerer writes that science can be a path to kinship and acts of reciprocity. She says in her experience, ecologists are driven by passion. Do you think science can bring us together and create more passion for the earth? Why/why not?
11. In "People of Corn, People of Light," Kimmerer writes about the chasm between Western science and "ecological compassion." She dreams of a world where "revelations of science" are "framed with an Indigenous worldview – stories in which matter and spirit are both given voice." Do you think this is possible? How could it come about?
12. Are there practical insights and wisdom you will take from this book and incorporate into your everyday life? Do you already practice some?