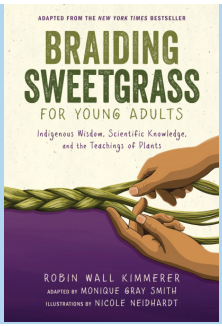
Discussion Guide



Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults
Robin Wall Kimmerer (author), Monique Gray Smith (adapter). Nicole Neidhardt (illustrator)

Zest Books
2022
304 pages
ISBN: 978-1728458991

Food and Nutrition

Summary

Adapted for young adults by Monique Gray Smith, this edition of *Braiding Sweetgrass*, by Robin Wall Kimmerer, reinforces how wider ecological understanding stems from listening to the earth's oldest teachers: the plants around us. With informative sidebars, reflection questions, and art from illustrator Nicole Neidhardt, *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults* brings Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and the lessons of plant life to a new generation.

Questions

Meeting Sweetgrass

1. In the story, "Skywoman Falling", the indigenous Creation story (pp. 11-14), 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? What information about food and nutrition would you want to pass on?

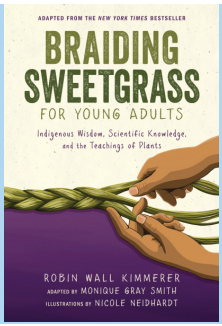
Planting Sweetgrass

1. In the 'Council of Pecans' (pp. 30-34), 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?
2. The 'Gift of Strawberries' (pp. 35-40), introduces the reader to the "gift economy" which is described as "goods and services not purchased but received as gifts from the earth". The author further explains that "Gratitude and reciprocity are the currency of a gift economy". How can gratitude and respect help us in our food choices?
3. 'Asters and goldenrod' (pp.46-50) delves into Kimmerer's need to question and know about the relationship between these flowers. "It's a matter of aesthetics and of ecology. Those complementary colors of gold and purple are opposites on the color wheel. Growing together, both receive more visits from pollinators than they would if they were growing alone" (p. 48). What is the interdependency between humans and plants? And what happens if we don't live up to our end of the relationship? What happens to our health?

This discussion guide has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds from the National Library of Medicine (NLM), National Institutes of Health (NIH). The content is attributed to Robin Wall Kimmerer and Longwood Gardens Library and Archives and reformatted by the NNLM Reading Club for educational use and is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). March 2023

NNLM Network of the National Library of Medicine

Discussion Guide



Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults
Robin Wall Kimmerer (author), Monique Gray Smith (adapter). Nicole Neidhardt (illustrator)

Zest Books
2022
304 pages
ISBN: 978-1728458991

Food and Nutrition

Tending Sweetgrass

1. In the story 'Maple Sugar Moon' (pp. 53-54), Nanabozho finds that people have grown lazy due to the bounty of the first Maple trees. Nanabozho removes this culture of plenty by diluting the sap and teaching the people to honor and respect the gift of the Maple tree. Can you draw any parallels from this story and our consumer-driven economy? In what ways are we wasting earth's gifts – its non-renewable, natural resources?
2. If we think about the earth bestowing us with a responsibility to harvest her gifts in honorable ways, how might you reimagine the ways we produce and sell food?
3. In 'Allegiance to Gratitude' (pp. 64-72), Kimmerer introduces the Haudenosaunee Thanksgiving Address used by the indigenous people to give thanks to the land. She goes on to describe the link between gratitude and reciprocity. How can we use our gifts to show our gratitude?

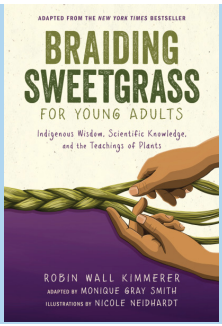
Picking Sweetgrass

1. What do each of the Three Sisters – corn, beans, and squash – bring to their reciprocal relationship? How can this partnership create a stronger community? Can you think of other win-win situations about how we care for ourselves?
2. Here we learned the many ways the three sisters help one another flourish. Who around you might need some help flourishing, and how can you use your gifts to support them?
3. Kimmerer describes the experiment on harvesting sweetgrass in different ways. What did they learn? How was this different than what you might have expected?
4. Kimmerer introduces the principles of the "Honorable Harvest"- never take the first, ask permission, listen for an answer, take only what you need, minimize harm, use everything you take, share, be grateful, reciprocate the gift. She also expands on each of these principles. Which of these principles most stood out to you? How can the principles of the "Honorable Harvest" help remove food inequity in our communities?
5. The author frequently cautions against cultural appropriation. Can you think of examples Kimmerer shared about asking permission to share stories or knowledge in the book?

This discussion guide has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds from the National Library of Medicine (NLM), National Institutes of Health (NIH). The content is attributed to Robin Wall Kimmerer and Longwood Gardens Library and Archives and reformatted by the NNLM Reading Club for educational use and is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). March 2023

NNLM Network of the National Library of Medicine

Discussion Guide



Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults
Robin Wall Kimmerer (author), Monique Gray Smith (adapter). Nicole Neidhardt (illustrator)

Zest Books
2022
304 pages
ISBN: 978-1728458991

Food and Nutrition

Braiding Sweetgrass

1. Kimmerer describes her students experience at the Cranberry Lake Biological Station by sharing ‘Shopping at Walmarsh’. Kimmerer discusses marshes (sometimes described as wastelands) and the many uses of items found there. She states “a landscape that once supported some of the world’s highest biodiversity now supports a single crop or has become a parking lot. A true waste of land“ (p. 134). How did hearing about the students’ experience change your views of marshes?
2. Kimmerer talks again in this section about reciprocity and flourishing and the sweetgrass experiment. “The most vigorous stands are the ones tended by basket makers. Reciprocity is a key to success. When the sweetgrass is cared for and treated with respect, she will flourish, but if the relationship fails, so does the plant” (p. 151). Can you think of any other examples that support the statement that “reciprocity is a key to success”?

Burning Sweetgrass

1. In ‘Windigo Footprints’ (pp. 165-168), Kimmerer draws parallels between the indigenous people’s stories of the Windigo monster and the greedy nature of mankind today. “It is the Windigo way that tricks us into believing that belongings will fill our hunger, when it’s belonging that we crave” (p. 168). How have you seen Windigo thinking in health and wellness advertising?
2. Kimmerer asks, “How can you lessen the impact of Windigo thinking in your life or in the community where you live? What is one change you can make to reduce the impact of Windigo thinking?”

This discussion guide has been funded in whole or in part with Federal funds from the National Library of Medicine (NLM), National Institutes of Health (NIH). The content is attributed to Robin Wall Kimmerer and Longwood Gardens Library and Archives and reformatted by the NNLM Reading Club for educational use and is solely the responsibility of the authors and does not represent the official views of the National Institutes of Health (NIH). March 2023

NNLM Network of the National Library of Medicine