

Discussion Guide



Fresh Banana Leaves: Healing Indigenous Landscapes Through Indigenous Science
Jessica Hernandez, Ph.D.

North Atlantic Books
2022
256 pages
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Environmental Health

Summary

An Indigenous environmental scientist breaks down why Western conservatism isn't working-- and offers Indigenous models informed by case studies, historical overviews, and stories that center the voices of Latin American women and land protectors. Even though Indigenous communities are among the most affected by climate devastation, Indigenous science is nowhere to be found in mainstream environmental policy or discourse. And while holistic land, water, and forest management practices born from millennia of Indigenous knowledge systems have much to teach all of us, Indigenous science has long been ignored, otherized, or perceived as "soft" -- the product of a systematic, centuries-long campaign of racism, colonialism, and extractive capitalism. Jessica Hernandez--a Maya Ch'orti' and Zapotec environmental scientist and founder of environmental agency Piña Soul--introduces and contextualizes Indigenous environmental knowledge and proposes a vision of land stewardship that heals rather than displaces, that generates rather than destroys. She breaks down the failures of Western-defined conservationism and shares alternatives, citing the restoration work of urban Indigenous people in Seattle; her family's fight against eco-terrorism in Latin America; and holistic land management approaches of Indigenous groups across the continent. If we're to recover the health of our planet--for everyone--we need to stop the eco-colonialism ravaging Indigenous lands and restore our relationships with Earth to one of harmony and respect. -- From back cover

Questions

1. The author's father taught that "nature protects us as long as we protect nature." Do you agree with this statement? Why or why not?
2. What do you think about the Indigenous practice of milpas? What are your thoughts about western farmers adopting this practice?
3. The author states, "If our landscapes were not degraded to make space for extractive agricultural practices, or huge cities, our landscapes would be protecting us from any climatic changes the earth underwent." (pg.31) Do you agree with this? Why or why not? Have you seen this in practice?

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4. Have you ever considered that urban environments are often indigenous spaces? Has reading more about this impacted your views on land acknowledgements and ways to include local indigenous communities?
5. Many scientific fields use numerical data to support their claims. What do you think about the author's assertion that this invalidates traditional communities? Do you think lived experiences or personal narratives should be included more often in research?
6. What were your thoughts about displaced, nonnative plants as being related to migratory or displaced human beings? Were you surprised to learn about any of these nonnative species?
7. In what ways do you think Western ideologies have removed people from the land? Do you think Indigenous ideologies will help make for healthier environments? Why or why not?
8. What do you wish you could ask the author? What would you ask other environmental scientists?
9. Who do you wish would read this book?
10. Has reading this book made you want to make any changes in how you protect the land? Which ones and why?