



Pushing the Limits of Heritage Featured Video and Book – Discussion Questions

Heritage...it's who and where we come from. And why it matters. Our personal past shapes our identity, grounding us in a culture and a place. But the speed of modern life dims that sense of belonging. It erodes old traditions and disrupts our ancestors' land. Each generation loses more of their origin story. And rebuilding those bonds can take years of effort.

Featured Video - Joe and Kristen Souza

- What do you think about Joe and Kristen Souza, their family, and their commitment to native Hawaiian forests and heritage?
- What are the metaphorical (or literal) seeds of your heritage that you'd like to plant for future generations? What kinds of technologies has your family used in the past or recently to pass on your heritage?
- What do you think about the mixture of handcrafting and high tech machines for creating ukuleles? Can you think of historical examples where some kind of art had been done in one specific, handcrafted way and then something came along that changed it (for example the printing press). How does that affect the heritage?

Featured Book – *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants*

Robin Wall Kimmerer, Nonfiction. As a botanist, Robin Wall Kimmerer has been trained to ask questions of nature with the tools of science. As a member of the Citizen Potawatomi Nation, she embraces the notion that plants and animals are our oldest teachers. In *Braiding Sweetgrass*, Kimmerer brings these two lenses of knowledge together to take us on “a journey that is every bit as mythic as it is scientific, as sacred as it is historical, as clever as it is wise” (Elizabeth Gilbert).

Drawing on her life as an indigenous scientist, and as a woman, Kimmerer shows how other living beings—asters and goldenrod, strawberries and squash, salamanders, algae, and sweetgrass—offer us gifts and lessons, even if we've forgotten how to hear their voices. In reflections that range from the creation of Turtle Island to the forces that threaten its flourishing today, she circles toward a central argument: that the awakening of ecological consciousness requires the acknowledgment and celebration of our reciprocal relationship with the rest of the living world. For only when we can hear the languages of other beings will we be capable of understanding the generosity of the earth, and learn to give our own gifts in return. [amazon.com](https://www.amazon.com)





- “Plants tell their stories not by what they say, but by what they do.” What was your favorite plant story in Braiding Sweetgrass and what lesson did you learn from it?
- Is there a plant like the fragrant “wiingashk” that is as special to you or holds value for you? Why?
- Throughout Braiding Sweetgrass, 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?
- Scientific knowledge and indigenous ways of knowing are complimentary, just like goldenrod and New England asters, do you think there’s a need for objectivity (science) and subjectivity to mesh together for there to be a fuller appreciation of plants, animals and the natural world?
- In “People of Corn, People of Light,” Kimmerer writes about the chasm between Western science and “ecological compassion” and her dream 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, and how could it come about?
- How can people living in less proximity to nature practice concepts that Kimmerer introduces like the Honorable Harvest or reciprocity? What might you incorporate into your life?

Questions courtesy of USFWS Library, America’s Wild Read