

MAINE
COAST
SEMESTER
at CHEWONKI



Dear Semesters 73 and 74,

We are excited to welcome you to Maine Coast Semester and to introduce you to your pre-semester reading assignment: **Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass***. The **purpose of this pre-semester reading** is to begin our time together with a book that provides a preview of the themes that will be introduced in many of your courses and fieldwork. We hope this will set you up for a successful semester.

Themes within the text include:

- Human relationships with the more than human world
- The ways our lives and culture are shaped by:
 - Stories we tell
 - The interplay of different ways of knowing
 - Ritual and ceremony
- Practicing reciprocity with the natural world

When you arrive on campus for the opening day of your semester, you should have completed reading the following parts of *Braiding Sweetgrass*:

1. Preface
2. All of Section 1: Planting Sweetgrass (six chapters)
3. All of Section 2: Tending Sweetgrass (five chapters)
4. The first chapter in Section 4: "In the Footsteps of Nanabozho: Becoming Indigenous to Place"
5. The Epilogue
6. One or two essays from each of the remaining sections. Read the ones that you are drawn to. If you want suggestions, here are some that we recommend because they are aligned with various parts of the MCS curriculum:

Picking Sweetgrass: "The Three Sisters," "Maple Nation: A Citizenship Guide,"
"The Honorable Harvest"

Braiding Sweetgrass: "Sitting in a circle," "Umbilicaria: The Belly Button of the
World"

Burning Sweetgrass: "Windigo Footprints," "The Sacred and the Superfund"
(*This essay has some dark pieces, proceed knowing this if you'd like to*)

Use these questions to guide your reading and come prepared to do some writing related to them once you arrive:

1. Kimmerer presents this book as a “braid...woven from three strands: Indigenous ways of knowing, scientific knowledge, and the story of a Anishinabekwe scientist trying to bring them together in service to what matters most” (x). Where do these different “strands” show up in the book? What is the purpose of telling this story through three intertwined perspectives?
2. Kimmerer shares about the evolving lenses she uses to interact with the natural world. As you think about your life, how would you describe the different influences on your relationship with the more than human world? Which essays or perspectives felt the most resonant to you?
3. Kimmerer talks about how stories impact her and others’ perceptions of the world - what stories impact your world view? What stories are you carrying with you as you prepare to join Maine Coast Semester?

We will have time during orientation to write about and discuss *Braiding Sweetgrass*. We will also weave your reflections on the book into opening conversations with your advisor. Please come to campus ready to engage the text in these ways. You are welcome to purchase a copy of the book, or borrow one from your local library. You can also listen to an audio version of the book online. If you do purchase the book, we recommend that you bring it with you to support our discussion and writing.

If you are interested in learning more about Robin Wall Kimmerer or *Braiding Sweetgrass*, The New Yorker Radio Hour podcast has an excellent [episode](#) from August 2023 about the writer and her work.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if anything is unclear to you.



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