Wisdom of the Natural World
2023 Fall Read Booklist

Braiding Sweetgrass – Indiginous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and the Teachings of Plants (Robin Wall Kimmer) A citizen of the Potawatomi Nation, Kimmerer is also a botanist whose perspective springs from the idea that plants and animals are our oldest teachers. This work explores the ways in which other living beings including strawberries and squash and salamanders and algae offer lessons as well as gifts if only we hear their voices. She suggests that awakening our ecological consciousness requires acknowledging and celebrating our reciprocal relationships with the rest of the living world.

Bewilderment – A Novel (Richard Powers) Power’s novel follows astrobiologist Theo Byrne who searches for meaning through the cosmos as he struggles to raise his unusual nine-year-old son following the death of his wife. Robin, the son in this poignant novel, spends hours painting pictures of endangered animals. As he struggles to understand the death of his mother, he begins to act out and his father struggles to keep him off psychoactive drugs. Tied to soaring descriptions of the natural world, father and son share a profound love as they face the challenge of understanding our beautiful and imperiled earth.

Running with Sherman the Donkey with the Heart of Hero (Christopher McDougall) The relationship between the author and a rescued donkey forms the basis of this exploration between a family and an animal who came to them in such terrible shape that he could barely move. His hair was coming out in clumps and his hooves were grown to the point his very existence was threatened. Set in rural Pennsylvania Amish country and in Leadville, Colorado, this work explores the lessons of burro racing where humans and donkeys run together as well as the communities that come together to help save the donkey Sherman.

Poetry Pairings: Pop-up BookBytes
Poetry selections have been paired with each of the books in this series. They include An American Sunrise (Harjo); Cloudshade: Poems of the High Plains (Howe); Local Knowledge Fairchild); They Dance in the Sky: Native American Star Myths (Monroe & Williamson); Tiger, Tiger; Burning Bright (Waters, ed.); History of Kindness (Hogan); and selected star poems.
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Book Discussion Leaders

Cheryl Dunn grew up in Hays, Kansas. Both parents grew up in farm families, so perhaps it was natural for Cheryl to obtain biology degrees at Ft. Hays State University. She and her husband met in graduate school and today, he works at the Nebraska Game and Parks Commission while she is the research manager and herbarium curator for the University of Nebraska Department of Agronomy and Horticulture’s Institute of Agriculture and Natural Resources - Range, Pasture, and Forages program. Sponsoring research, teaching, and extension programs, the organization is committed to addressing the conservation and utilization of rangeland and forage resources.

Leslie VonHolen Her writing interests are in the area of environmental art and culture. “Our land, the weather, the seasons, and even the night sky dictate the terms of our lives,” she said. “No one knows that better than people who live and work in the High Plains. That’s why I love discussing books for HPPR. Our conversations always expand my perceptions.” Honored in 2022 with a Tallgrass Artist Residency, Leslie holds KU degrees in history, English literature, and public administration. She lives in Lawrence with her kids, dog, and her husband Tim, an elementary school art teacher.

Bob Seay of Lamar, Colorado, is a writer who also teaches band, choir and guitar classes at his local high school. That’s his day job. By night, he posts and rails against the universe on social media at BobSeay.com. Bob is the author of The Band Room, Dad, Drawn to Murder and Portrait of a Murder. In 2016, Bob ran for Congress in a very conservative district. He notes that, “two out of three voters felt that he should continue teaching.

Jane Holwerda is a seasoned Book Leader for the HPPR Radio Readers Book Club. She is also the vice president of Academic Affairs at Dodge City Community College, yet describes herself as a creative and reflective English major at heart. Holwerda has long kept that spirit alive, publishing dozens of poems, memoirs and short stories over time. Her short story “Vanishing Point” was awarded the Paul Somers Creative Prose Prize by the Society for the Study of Midwestern Literature. In addition to being an avid reader, Jane loves hiking, cats and the small towns of the High Plains.