

# Braiding Sweetgrass

**R**obin Wall Kimmerer is a professor of ecology, and she is also a daughter of Skywoman, the one who, according to Anishinaabe mythology, created the Earth with the help of animals, and made it a lush garden to sustain them all.

In this deeply moving book, Robin lets us look at the world through her own microscope which contains two lenses: science, and Native American wisdom. By bringing these complementary world-views together in a uniquely poetic way, she makes us rethink our relationship to non-human beings with whom we not only share our home, but to whom we also owe our life.

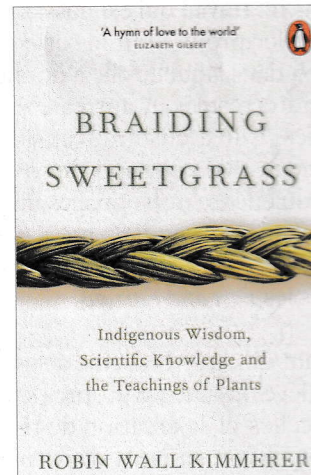
With the same tenderness as when braiding Sweetgrass, Robin deftly weaves American history with indigenous tales, ecological facts with metaphorical depictions of the more-than-human world, and personal experience with philosophical reflections. Like a red thread connecting her stories, she conveys teachings of an art of living that was there long before Man set foot on the Earth. She tells of her ancestors who learnt from nature itself, for in indigenous thinking, Plants are the First Teachers. Thus, it was Black Ash, Maple, and Mother Cedar who taught the People to tend the land in return for its gifts, and likewise it was Corn, Beans, and

Squash who showed humans the art of reciprocity.

But Robin also reminds us of what happens when men forget this ageless wisdom. She tells how Native Peoples were stripped away from their homelands, and how grasses were separated from their communities to be bred in soulless monocultures. She describes how sacred shores were turned into waste grounds, and how, within a mere generation, an entire nation lost most of its language, knowledge, and traditions. She talks, nonetheless, about the faint, flickering flame that kept warming indigenous hearts even after it all. It is the same spark that makes plants come back to a polluted place and work with microscopic friends to regenerate the soil. It is the blaze of life, and life knows its way home.

In a time when Western Man has forgotten his responsibility to those who give him breath, this book comes as tinder to rekindle the fire. And like a compass, it shows us the way back to a balanced relationship with our prime elders, based on gratitude and mutual care. I laughed, I cried, but above all I, too, felt a flame rise in my heart: the rage against the insatiable Windigo mind, the urge to protect those who do not have a voice, and to give the Earth back, at last, the gift of love.

Léa Chabaud



**Braiding Sweetgrass**  
**Robin Wall Kimmerer**  
**Penguin Press**  
**2020**  
**400 pages**