

Food as Kin in Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*

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Abstract

Using the concept of environmental justice from ecocriticism, this paper will argue that Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* urges kinful interactions between human beings and plants—particularly those used for food. This argument expands Robert Dale Parker's definition of environmental justice, which focuses on human power imbalances on racial, economic, and national lines, to include justice along the human/nonhuman binary and encourages respectful and reciprocal relations between human beings and food used for consumption. After distinguishing between these different environmental justice frameworks, I closely analyze three examples of human/non-human interaction from Kimmerer's non-fictional text, a hybrid text that combines Kimmerer's training in the sciences and her extensive knowledge of Indigenous practices. My analysis—combining close textual analysis with historicization—details how reciprocal interactions with food suggest more ethical approaches to the land.

This ethical approach, while grounded in small moments from an individual's memoir, poses outsized consequences: a non-commodified relationship to nature challenges our current environmental practices that are slowly killing the earth and all those inhabiting it.

Introduction

The act of growing and eating food is inherently political. The practices used to turn food from seeds to fully-grown plants, as well as transporting the plants from their growing location to

a market and a consumer, consider both economic and political implications, with those that are most “profitable” becoming commonplace. These methods leave out the health of the food being grown and transported, as well as the land being used for cultivation. One question arises from these practices: Why are humans not listening to the land and the food? It appears that nonhuman entities that keep the food system running are being exploited and overworked, putting future communities—both human and nonhuman—at risk.

An environmental justice approach must be taken to make sure that future food supply, and the generations that depend on it, is sustained and healthy. Robin Wall Kimmerer’s *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* offers a view into the world of food that encourages a more respectful and regenerative method of agriculture. This act of justice for food—and the nonhuman in general—is rarely taken into account. Robert Dale Parker offers a definition of environmental justice that focuses on power imbalances between different human groups (Parker 384), but Kimmerer, and myself, intend to offer an expanded version of this definition that includes nonhuman entities. Kimmerer expands this definition through both her weaving of Indigenous ways of knowing and personal anecdotes into her book. These methods are particularly crucial for the current moment, as our relationship with the land is leading to its deterioration. Our treatment of the land references what Rob Nixon calls “slow violence,” a violence that

occurs gradually and out of sight, a violence of delayed destruction that is dispersed across time and space, an attritional violence that is typically not viewed as violence at all. (Nixon 2)

Looking down at a plate of vegetables can be rewarding, as we believe that we are doing what is best for ourselves and the planet, but we are misguided in that self-fulfillment. The planet is getting warmer and our food systems are being negatively affected by climate change. Without taking an environmental approach to our food, our (humans’) lives will drastically change for the

worse. Justice for the environment creates justice for all, which Kimmerer consciously details. Using the concept of environmental justice from ecocriticism, this paper will argue that Robin Wall Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants* urges kinful interactions between human beings and food. This argument expands Robert Dale Parker's definition of environmental justice to include justice along the human/nonhuman binary and encourages respectful and reciprocal relations between human beings and food used for consumption. This relationship is crucial for the survival of our planet and ourselves, as our current agriculture and food production practices are slowly killing the earth and all those inhabiting it.

Theoretical Background and Traditional Ecological Knowledge

Environmental justice offers a particularly beneficial lens in which to look at current agricultural and food production practices. Robert Dale Parker, in his book *How to Interpret Literature: Critical Theory for Literary and Cultural Studies*, defines environmental justice as a form of environmental criticism that "calls attention to social imbalances of power along racial, economic, and national lines" (Parker 384). His approach, focusing on how environmental devastation affects groups with less economic and political power, references the approaches of both Rob Nixon and Ramachandra Guha/Juan Martinez-Alier.

These authors focus on environmental degradation and exploitation in poorer, powerless areas. Guha and Martinez-Alier, in their book *Varieties of Environmentalism*, explain that environmentalism of the poor originates in social conflict over access to and control over natural resources (Guha & Martinez-Alier xxi). Environmental justice actively fights against "environmental racism," a concept that gained traction in the late-20th century (32). This era of

environmental justice existed on a platform opposed to the incineration of waste, which was occurring in lower-income areas with depressed economies (32). Rob Nixon offers a view of environmental justice through the eyes of Ken Saro-Wiwa, Nigerian author and political activist, in his book *Slow Violence and the Environmentalism of the Poor*. Nixon explains Saro-Wiwa's belief that environmental justice "focuses on the battle between subnational micro-ethnicities and transnational macroeconomic powers" (Nixon 112). This definition is based on the Ogoni people's fight against Shell and the Nigerian government, both of which were extracting oil in ways that led to frequent crude oil-spills and unhealthy living conditions.

These three definitions—Parker's, Guha & Martinez-Alier's, and Nixon's— showcase how environmental justice's focus has primarily been on creating better environmental and living conditions to communities that are primarily people of color, poor, and powerless. Attention has been given to pushing back against what Nixon calls "antihuman environmentalism," where wealthy nations and Western NGOs have tried to impose green environmentalism on poorer, "invisible" countries (5). These efforts should continue to gain traction globally, but I argue that there should be an expansion of this fight for justice: justice for the nonhuman. This expansion is supplemented through Indigenous ecological knowledge, also known as Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK). For my argument in particular, knowledge from Indigenous groups in the United States will be explored, though other indigenous knowledge systems should be more broadly analyzed and incorporated when applicable.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is founded on the principle of reciprocity, the idea that when we take from the land, we must gift a reciprocal offering in return (Robyn 199). All parts of the environment—plants, animals, rocks, water—are seen as gifts from the Creator (199), and all forms of life are animated in ways that lead us to see, experience, and know "new ways of living

in the world” (Kimmerer 58-59). There is a spiritual connection between humans and the natural world, a connection that is seen as sacred and balanced (Robyn 202). For many Indigenous peoples, these values regarding the land stem from strong familial ties, kinship ties, the environment, and knowledge of the unity of all things (202). This opposes the European view of the land, which focuses on exploitation and commodification, with little thought given to future health of land and culture (202).

This concept offers a “radical” (in more capitalist countries) view of the land in a world where land is seen as something to be controlled and exploited and not something equal to humans. Reciprocal thinking offers a land that is healthy, unified, and whole, instead of one being ravished through exploitation (Kimmerer 260). It is an important partner in both environmental and cultural restoration, as the well-being of the land is tied to the well-being of both the individual and the community (Kimmerer 529). Of course, when stepping back and looking at this knowledge system from a distance, it may not seem radical, but it does disrupt the “development” and “progress” that many large, capitalist organizations strive for. It comes as no surprise, then, that these types of knowledge systems have been left out of environmental policy discussions.

Historically, in the US, TEK has been disregarded and ignored by policy makers due to colonial-style policies and practices based on false assumptions that Indigenous peoples were uncivilized savages who impeded the growth of technology and progress (Robyn 199). This “othering” of Indigenous peoples has led them to be excluded from any environmental policy decision-making, even if policy makers are negatively affected by the final decision (199). Exclusion from these discussions brings negative consequences to everyone, though, as collaboration with Indigenous peoples and TEK would create a healthier planet—and culture—for

all (199). Alongside the exclusion from policy discussions, this system of knowledge has been criminalized by the US court system. Indigenous peoples fighting against multinational corporate giants through activism have regularly been criminalized and arrested (198). This forceful silencing, much like exclusion from policy talks, is “injurious to Native peoples and, in effect, all people, not only in the United States but worldwide” (198).

Even with Indigenous groups gaining more rights and freedoms throughout the years, colonial practices, and the colonizers themselves, adapt to devise new means of oppressing the colonized (201). Colonization never ended; new foreign powers—banks, corporations, speculators, governments, and development agencies—continue to oppress Indigenous peoples and knowledge systems (201). Today, Indigenous peoples are at the frontline of contemporary colonial struggles, fighting for sovereignty of land that is seen as “unowned, underutilized, and, therefore, open to exploitation” (201). This forceful taking of land is a catalyst for unsustainable practices, as TEK offers sustainable, reciprocal, and regenerative ways of knowing and doing that benefit all, but these new colonizers denigrate it harshly, making Indigenous groups easy targets as resource colonies (201).

Kimmerer's *Braiding Sweetgrass* is critical in the exploration of expanding Parker's definition of environmental justice. My argument is less about disregarding Parker—or Guha/Martinez-Alier and Nixon—and more about listening to Indigenous voices. As I have just detailed, their bodies of knowledge are incredibly important in changing how we grow, cultivate, and experience food, and their inclusion in these talks are long overdue. Kimmerer offers a new way of knowing that goes against Western knowledge and sciences, which have become a “hegemonic, assuming superior power” that claims “‘truth’ with a capital T above and beyond other forms of ‘local’ knowledge” (Nelson 190). I argue that it is time for those not Indigenous to

listen closely and with an open mind, as a new future can be envisioned within TEK and *Braiding Sweetgrass*.

In the proceeding section, I will explore three examples from the text that explore TEK, specifically the kinful relations between Kimmerer and food. These examples will come from the chapters “Epiphany in the Beans,” “The Three Sisters,” and “The Honorable Harvest,” all of which give personal accounts of her experiences with food, as well as the lessons learned from these plants. The examples intertwine scientific knowledge and literary prose, with particular attention given to prose, showcasing how these relationships are based on both scientific knowledge and kinful interactions. All three of my close readings urge humans to fight for the plants’ livelihoods, which will, in turn, assist humans in their own livelihoods through consumption of healthy, thriving food. They are perfect instances of real-life applications of TEK and reciprocal thinking.

There are a myriad of issues to address regarding environmental justice and Indigenous peoples, but I will not be focusing on these in this paper. Land sovereignty, neocolonialism and neo-colonization, and the mental and physical health of Native peoples are examples of topics that need to be tackled, but this paper does not analyze these issues. My focus on humans’ relationship with food and land is only one example of the larger systemic change that needs to occur, and I urge continued relearning and open-mindedness in the fight for justice for those both human and nonhuman.

Kinful Relations in Action: Examples from *Braiding Sweetgrass*

Published in 2013, *Braiding Sweetgrass* is still a fresh text in both scientific writing and literary studies. The text was published by Milkweed Editions, a publisher known for taking “risks on debut and experimental writers” (milkweed.org). Kimmerer, a botanist, restorative ecologist, and professor, offered new ways of looking at humans’ relationship to the land, which was risky in a world still dominated by Western traditions and ways of thinking. These new perspectives come through in scientific explanation and memoir, where Kimmerer uses her own—and her loved ones’ and close friends’—accounts to explain, scientifically and humanistically, why certain environmental happenings occur. She grounds her explanation and experiences in her Indigenous upbringing, using Traditional Ecological Knowledge and restoration ecology to showcase the “intertwined respectful and reciprocal relationships” between humans and nonhumans, while also talking about “the loss of this reciprocity, and the hope of ecological restoration to return the gifts of Mother Earth and the balance that once was” (Longwood Gardens). Upon initial review, the text has yet to become a powerhouse in either scientific or literary fields, meaning that future criticism may push it further into mainstream thinking.

After the book was published, praise poured in. The book has been described by Kathleen Dean Moore as “far more than a memoir or a field guide. I would call it a wisdom book because...Robin has something world changing to pass along” (Moore 407). James Hatley explains that the book “functions not only as natural history but also as ceremony,” (Hatley 144) a concept Kimmerer touches upon in the text itself. Natchee Barnd brings attention to how the text “clearly illustrates and fully realizes the potential of an environmental humanities approach,” seemingly touching upon the use of literary prose in the explanation of scientific problems and

solutions (Barnd 440). These reviews have been published in journals focused on Native American studies, environmental philosophy, and environmental science, showcasing that those already sympathetic to the issues Kimmerer describes are the main reviewers of her book.

Based on initial reviews, there have been few negative responses to the book. Most reviewers focus on the beauty of the writing, the flawless intertwining of scientific and indigenous knowledge, and the urging of changing base knowledge systems. Little dispute of the science is published, though the reviewers' academic expertises have rarely been in botany or restorative ecology. Initial reactions to the text are seemingly characterizing the book as more creative nonfiction than scientific literature. My analysis focuses primarily on the text's literary importance as well.

The following three examples are ordered in an intentional manner. The first example focuses on a broader entity as kin (a garden), the second a smaller entity with multiple parts (corn, beans, and squash), and the third a specific plant (leeks). The examples are chronological in the book, but they are not necessarily chronologically correct in lived experiences. The text, as a whole, acts less as a chronological narrative and more like an anthology of individual narratives.

The first example of this reciprocal, kinful way of knowing comes from Kimmerer's chapter titled "Epiphany in the Beans." This example approaches humans' interaction with food on a broader scale, looking at how a garden, as an entity, acts as kin. The chapter begins with Kimmerer walking through her garden, inspecting her pole beans and picking some for future meals. She walks back to her kitchen, walking through squash, tomato, and potato plants and stumbling upon traces of her daughters picking potatoes. Reminiscing on the planting of the seeds for her bean plants, she contemplates on the Iroquois sky goddess Skywoman and her gift

of various plants through seeds. Planting a garden, she believes, brings an abundance of gifts and lessons, of which she and her daughters partake in throughout the year. It is her way of showing love for her daughters, but she also believes that the gifts of the garden (food) are a way of the land showing love for us (humans). She explains this in a passage that clearly materializes various sensory experiences:

Maybe it was the smell of ripe tomatoes, or the oriole singing, or that certain slant of light on a yellow afternoon and the beans hanging thick around me. It just came to me in a wash of happiness that made me laugh out loud, startling the chickadees who were picking at the sunflowers, raining black and white hulls on the ground. I knew it with a certainty as warm and clear as the September sunshine. The land loves us back. She loves us with beans and tomatoes, with roasting ears and blackberries and birdsongs. By a shower of gifts and a heavy rain of lessons. She provides us and teaches us to provide for ourselves. That's what good mothers do. (Kimmerer 122)

Kimmerer brings us on a sensory journey, touching upon how sight, smell, taste, and hearing help create unified fulfillment. Her clear explanation of all sensory experiences invites us to join her in her happiness, though we, as the reader, are unable to travel to that specific moment with her. As readers, envisioning the smell of tomatoes, the sound of birds, the feeling of sun and the shadows it creates, and the love of caretakers is easy, as these examples are common occurrences, though each reader will have different memories of these moments. She is giving us an intimate look into her internal and external emotions, a vulnerability that most experience only with close friends and family members. The descriptions given showcase that she feels this type of connection with all of the nonhuman entities depicted—tomatoes, birds, sunshine, berries, and corn—and that they act as neighbors, mentors, teachers, and collaborators through their lessons and guidance.

Her description of garden as mother expresses the idea that food is kin, and, although not specifically detailed, she encourages this type of relationship for her readers. This kinful relationship is a tenet of Traditional Ecological Knowledge, as explained previously, treating the garden as a whole as an influential entity in her life. Her care for the environment is reciprocated through the garden's gifts of food; the relationship is based on an exchange of care instead of a monetary one (Westrick 97). This is why when she has full baskets of food from her garden, she describes them as "baskets full of mother love. The ultimate reciprocity, loving and being loved in return" (Kimmerer 123). Readers familiar with exploitative agricultural practices will see this passage as abnormal, but that is the argument Kimmerer is putting forth. Having a close, intimate relationship, one filled with love, gratitude, respect, and reciprocity—resembling a relationship with a loved one—is important in rethinking how humans interact with the land. Of course, this is only one example, but this theme exists in the other examples I will lay out.

Another example is seen in the chapter "The Three Sisters," where Kimmerer explains how the familial—kinful—relations between squash, beans, and corn mimic those seen in human families. This example narrows down the approach of food as kin, focusing on how the Three Sisters, as an entity, act "kinfully" between each other and humans. She specifically details how corn, beans, and squash benefit from each other through how they grow above ground. Corn is

the firstborn and grows straight and stiff; it is a stem with a lofty goal. Laddering upwards, leaf by long-ribbed leaf, it must grow quickly. Making a strong stem is its highest priority at first. (130)

This urgency is due to its relationship with beans, which are the younger sister of corn (130).

Kimmerer explains that

Beans put out a pair of heart-shaped leaves on the stub of a [corn] stem, then another pair, and another, all low to the ground. The bean focuses on leaf growth while the corn

concentrates on height. (130).

Since the beans are the “middle child” of the Three Sisters, they have a tendency to change course, “as middle children are wont to do” (130). Beans shoot tips will eventually shoot up in the air and make a circle, a process known as circumnutation (130). The bean vine will eventually wrap around the corn and wait to make leaves until the corn is ready (130).

Finally, Kimmerer explains the “late bloomer of the family”: the squash (131). She details that the squash

is steadily extending herself over the ground, moving away from the corn and beans, setting up broad lobed leaves like a stand of umbrellas waving at the ends of hollow petioles.

The leaves and vines are distinctly bristly, giving second thoughts to nibbling caterpillars.

As the leaves grow wider, they shelter the soil at the base of the corn and beans, keeping the moisture in, and other plants out. (131).

The squash acts as a protector of the corn and beans, making sure that nothing will harm them during the growing process. Although the squash is the youngest, she is willing to guard her siblings so that they can all flourish in harmony.

Explanation of this process may seem unnecessary, but it is vital to Kimmerer’s argument. She says that “the lessons of reciprocity are written clearly in a Three Sisters garden,” (131) as all are collaborating for the success of the whole. It resembles sisters completing certain chores or activities that need to be done, divvying up the work so that each sibling benefits from the work of the other two. Without the contributions of the other sisters, no one plant can flourish; it takes a team for all to thrive. Kimmerer gives great attention to the fact that

they are sisters: one twines easily around the other in relaxed embrace while the sweet baby sister lolls at their feet, close, but not too close—cooperating, not competing. Seems to me I’ve seen this before in human families, in the interplay of sisters. (132)

By focusing on the familial connections between corn, beans and squash, she is humanizing the nonhuman. Painting the Three Sisters as people, instead of “just plants,” encourages readers to empathize with their maturing processes and respect their needs and wants—as well as letting the sisters “interplay” with each other without disruption. Much like children, the sisters need extra time, care, and love to grow; this nurturing will help both the sisters and humans in the long run.

She continues to explain this relationship by giving a personal account of her own family. Using these plants as symbols of her own family—where corn is the first born, beans the middle child, and squash the youngest— she suggests that without

the corn’s support, the beans would be an unruly tangle on the ground, vulnerable to bean-hungry predators. It might seem as if she is taking a free ride in this garden, benefiting from the corn’s height and the squash’s shade but by the rule of reciprocity none can take more than she gives. The corn takes care of making light available; the squash reduces weeds. What about the beans? To see her gift you have to look underground. (132)

My final example comes from Kimmerer’s chapter “The Honorable Harvest.” Focusing specifically on a singular plant, this example showcases how kinful relations can work within both broader systems and individual entities. The passage comes from the beginning of the chapter, where she has a conversation with the patches of leeks that grow in a field close to her home. She describes that

The dense patches of leeks are among the first to appear in the spring, their green so vivid that they signal like a neon sign: PICK ME! I resist the urge to answer their call immediately and instead address the plants the way I’ve been taught: introducing myself in case they’ve forgotten, even though we’ve been meeting like this for years. I explain why I’ve come and ask their permission to harvest, inquiring politely if they would be willing to share. (175)

Kimmerer humanizes the leeks in two distinct ways: through the leeks' color change in the spring and her mindful greeting when she approaches them. Firstly, she explains that the green of the leeks in the spring is a form of communication. They, like humans, change appearance as they grow, offering the viewers a picture of the leeks as maturing people. Kimmerer knows through this form of communication how the leeks are feeling, learning when it is acceptable to pick them. Secondly, she talks about introducing herself to them when she approaches the patches. The act of introducing oneself to plants is not common in Western ways of thinking, but TEK teaches this mutual respect for nonhuman entities. She explains that she introduces herself "even though we've been meeting like this for years." This treatment of the leeks is reminiscent of seeing an old friend, one that is close emotionally but perhaps far geographically. These types of friends are important in one's life, as there is always much to catch up on—to listen to. Even after only a year passing, Kimmerer continues to listen and learn from the leeks, enriching her and much as she enriches them. This introduction leads to her asking if she can pick them. She does this to respect the "personhood of the plant," (178) while also assessing the health of the population. Specifically, she asks if they are "willing to share," recognizing that the leeks are not growing solely for human consumption. They help feed other entities—animals and the land itself— and there are only so many leeks that can be picked. She expresses that she asks the leeks to "restore the bonds between ground and my children, so that they will always carry the substance of home in the mineral of their bones" (176). Not only do these leeks feed her and her family physically but also spiritually and emotionally. The leeks act as memories—memories of time spent with close friends, with kin.

She uses this story to ask an important question: How do we consume in a way that does justice to the lives that we take? (177) Bringing in the idea of justice suggests that TEK should

be used to honor and respect those with less power—the nonhuman. The leeks are kin to human beings, offering advice and solace when needed. This kinship does not mean that leeks will always be there when humans need them, and, much like humans, their emotions must be taken into account. As she says later in the chapter, “if we harvest with respect, the plants will help us” (183).

These three examples showcase how plants think, feel, and behave like human beings, and that recognizing their personhood—their “kinhood” — will only bring more sustainable, healthier, and unified land. This personhood suggests that humans also behave like food, closing the gap between the two. Working with food with intimacy and mindfulness allows humans to experience the life that inhabits each plant. Kimmerer uses scientific information to bring the reader into the world of the food item, letting them experience the “personhood” of the plant, while weaving in personal narrative to showcase how fulfilling agricultural work can be. Seeing food as kin opens up new possibilities for humans’ relationship with food, suggesting that humans, food, and the land can all benefit from a new perspective. This new perspective focuses on empathy and reciprocity, rather than exploitation, power, and control.

Kimmerer understands that for readers to pursue new methods of thinking, being, and doing, she must use literary prose to create an emotional response. Without this response, unsustainable, harmful practices will continue, leading to a grim future for both humans and the land. This is why an environmental justice perspective must be used when analyzing current agricultural thought and practices. While Parker’s, Guha & Martinez-Alier’s, and Nixon’s focus on the human in environmental justice does play a role in this argument—as humans will be affected by the degradation of land and food systems—it is important to see food as an entity equal to humans. The land that the food grows on is being exploited and destroyed using current

agricultural practices, meaning that food's home is being overpowered by human greed and consumption. It is vitally important that new ways of knowing, thinking, being, and doing are implemented so that we do not destroy the home that both humans and food inhabit. Justice for the land starts with rethinking our interactions with the land, which Kimmerer argues for and showcases within these three examples.

Conclusion

Even with the examples I have given, the urgency of this changing of knowledge systems can still be questioned. A key question can be raised: Why should *all* humans listen to and integrate Indigenous ecological practices when some Western science practices can just be tweaked? To this I answer, "Why not?" As I write this, the world is becoming increasingly warmer, with natural disasters devastating individuals and communities and leaving many displaced and suffering. For far too long it has been believed that Western science can "get us out" of the mess we have created, but action has been slow to occur and the goals are far too broad and distant for any meaningful change to happen in the short term. Kimmerer offers an argument that is based less on Indigenous cultural practices—though the text does frequently use culture as a guide for the restorative practice—and more on how we, as humans, survive our own destruction and prevent total environmental collapse.

Western thought, steeped in individualism, "freedom," capitalism, and exploitation, will not get us out of this mess. If it could, change would be made and progress would be seen, but this is not the case. Kimmerer offers a view of the world that seemingly goes against all that the West stands for, suggesting that thinking about the collective—and all inhabitants of the land, both human and nonhuman—will offer a brighter future for all. Of course, those who are deeply

involved in the individualism that permeates Western society will find this argument “radical,” but it is not. Kimmerer is urging that we, humans, care about other people and entities, focusing less on individual freedoms and more on how we can all work together to make the world a safer, healthier place to live. This means that a more empathetic view must be taken. The environment—and all that inhabit it—is not separate from society, nor is environmental justice just for humans, and Kimmerer gives us the blueprints for a more reciprocal, respectful, and empathetic future. TEK upends typical Western thought about the land and re-envisioning how we interact with food from seed to table.

This change does not have to be complicated. It starts with humans being willing to listen—to each other and to nonhuman entities. Removing personal ego from agricultural practices can unearth beneficial ways of living with the environment. Listening to those who are native to the land (Indigenous peoples and native species) is vital for the success of both the land and those who inhabit it. For too long the West has disregarded Indigenous knowledge, and, as *Writer’s Block Magazine’s* Stella Kanto explains:

There is a need for a change in our language and our ways of thinking, for only thus can we work towards a proper dissolution of the division between what we consider as sentient and valuable life and what we do not, and thereby an improved understanding of nonhumans. (Kanto)

Now is not the time to dig ourselves into a deeper hole; there are many who want to help, and the only option we have is to listen. Our lives depend on it.

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