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**College-Level Guide Questions for *Writing the Land: Foodways and Social Justice***

**by Hannah Podol**

**These 3 college-level reading guides are divided into separate focuses: section a) for use in sustainable agriculture programs; b) for use in social justice programs; c) for use in environmental studies programs**

* 1. **Agricultural program focus**

1. **Sustainable Iowa Land Trust**

“The land remembers the forest that came before” Dana Maya (20).

What is the role of remembrance in agriculture? Use this quote as a jumping off point to think about the ways in which land uses memory to heal and grow from human caused change. Is it possible for people to work in harmony with the land instead of abusing its resources, and what might that look like?

1. **Downeast Salmon Federation**

“Like agriculture on land, Mainers are now taking to aquaculture to grow fish and seaweeds as consumer goods” (28). How can farmers continue to evolve their agriculture practices as conservation becomes more and more vital?

1. **Peconic Land Trust**

After reading the introduction to the Peconic Land Trust, discuss the idea of offering an apprenticeship program in community supported agriculture. What does it mean to practice agriculture in a community oriented setting, and how can this be beneficial?

1. **Agrarian Land Trust**

“This is the story

in rural America when farmer has no voice despite

owners for generations and feeding the world” (54)

The poem *Action Acts On* uses the metaphor of a “government’s knife” to describe obstacles faced by family and rural farms. Reflect on the issues brought to light and the ways in which small farmers can be more supported and protected to feed the world.

1. **Community Ecology Institute**

List the ways that the Nourishing Gardens program is a good example of experiential learning. Next, brainstorm improvements you would like to make to this program to most effectively achieve its two primary goals: “transforming lawns into ecologically beneficial, food- growing gardens; and providing experiential learning and workforce development opportunities” (85).

1. **F.A.R.M.S.**

Malyk Rowell’s poem on page 106 brings up the power of learning from our elders. What can be gained from an elder's wisdom when carrying out agricultural practices?

1. **Northeast Farmers Of Color**

“To understand foodways is to understand food’s way: the original instructions encoded into seed, land, and kin- the why of all of it, the agency and potential of Land and non-human kin, independent of human beings’ existence- the intangible, implicit aspects of nature and culture” (120).

This quote is powerful. It reminds us to return to the “root” so to speak of foodways. Discuss tangible ways in which this task may be possible, and how to best intertwine the human and the non human.

1. **Poetry X Hunger**

Reflect on *Feed the Bellies* by Dianna L. Grayer. The commentary in this piece speaks of the direct effect food waste has on hunger for growing children. How can we make schools a sanctuary in which food injustices and lack of nutrients have no place?

1. **AGARTS**

This organization provides a unique blend of agriculture and arts, including music, to help those in need. Do you think that the combination of practicing regenerative agriculture, and bringing music into the lives of others transcends the boundaries of farming being a tool for healing?

1. **The Milk House Rural Writing Collective**

“The farm I grew up on was in a rural valley in Western New York that was covered in trees. Once the first light of the morning reached over the horizon the lawn exploded in birdsong” (177).

Why does this writing collective choose to tell stories like this one, centered around childhood, farms, and rural ways of life. How does it aim to change the narrative about rural living and agriculture?

1. **Martin Bridge**

“The permaculture framework and movement began as a response to Mollison identifying modern industrial agriculture as the single most destructive force on the planet. This concept is challenging for many, as most of us look at agriculture as a way that humankind interacts with nature to provide and fulfill the mission to be fruitful and multiply” (189).

In your agricultural classes or prior knowledge of the subject, is industrial agriculture commonly painted as a destructive force to the extreme Martin Bridge is asserting? How does this challenge your thinking, and to what extent do you agree with this statement?

1. **Seeds Of Solidarity**

After reading through the story of how this community cultivated such a successful grassroots event, does their journey inspire new possibilities for ways you can engage community members with the importance of growing nourishing food and regenerating soil? What sort of event would you hold in your neighborhood to further these same goals?

1. **Serpentine Art and Nature Commons**

In the place of the Serpentine Art and Nature Commons, would something like an urban garden or permaculture site be appropriate and in alignment with their mission? What do you foresee as the future of urban spaces practicing agriculture?

* 1. **Social justice/ art program focus**

1. **Sustainable Iowa Land Trust**

Suzan Erem asserts that “Diversity builds resilience” (3). Reflect on a social justice movement you have been a part of, or one happening in your community. How does Erem’s mantra apply to movement building?

1. **Downeast Salmon Federation**

“On this protected bend of river

The land and water have dominion.

I will bring my grandson here,

when he is angry and afraid

in the turbulent wake of his parents’ divorce” (31).

How does this excerpt from Linda Warren’s *Pleasant River* illuminate the importance of connection to land in the face of turbulence? Discuss the potential benefits gained from immersion in nature during social upheaval or times of injustice as a means of healing.

1. **Peconic Land Trust**

After reading *Laird at the Croft* by Scott Chaskey, reflect on the importance of furthering connections to land through art forms such as poetry. Compare and contrast art’s ability to express the beauty of land when it is written or visually created. Does one form resonate more than the other for you and why?

1. **Agrarian Land Trust**

“the air itself a messenger of distant galaxies, of nitrogen and carbon, of water and dust and pollen, all manner of stories and song sent earthward from the moon” (52).

In your own words, describe the power of using metaphors and relationality to understand the land and form deeper connections. When visiting farmland, how do you best cultivate relationships with the piece of earth with which you are visiting?

1. **Community Ecology Institute**

The poem *On Seeing a Proliferation of Mayapples at Freetown Farm* on page 87 opens with a land acknowledgment statement. Discuss the importance of providing such statements in the context of holistically acknowledging the land in which you inhabit. Are statements the best way of achieving this or could art also function to support this effort?

1. **F.A.R.M.S.**

Reflect on Doris Frazier’s piece: *The Land Writes Itself*. Which of the adjectives present resonates most strongly with you? Let the last three lines sit with you for a while, and ponder their deeper meaning in the context of working towards social justice.

1. **Northeast Farmers Of Color**

“Or maybe we could say, certain kinds of relationships with land are protected. And so in a way that is always going to be provisional, a provisional justice. This is what we got, these are the tools we got in this moment within this settler colonial, capitalist nation state” (124).

Think about these words. What does it mean to work for a goal under a society that promotes systematic racism and inequality? Reflect on the role of colonialism and race in the LandBack movement.

1. **Poetry X Hunger**

“There’s an abundance of food in this wide wide world.

Share the resources.

Nourish the innocent souls.

Let them survive and thrive- so they can rise” (159).

Analyze the last line of this passage through the lens of social activism. What does it mean to you to provide a child with resources that will let them “rise.”

1. **AGARTS**

Reflect on the Farm-to-Artist residencies discussed in this section of the book. Is this program one that you wish to implement elsewhere, and what would that look like?

1. **The Milk House Rural Writing Collective**

“The cultural loss that comes from stories never being shared soon has tangible consequences, especially in shrinking energy and support behind beneficial land management” (181).

Think about these words of Ryan Dennis, and apply them to social justice movements. What is the true importance of sharing stories, and what is the momentum gained from doing so?

1. **Martin Bridge**

“The most succinct definition that I like to use is that Permaculture is “A Design Science based on observation of natural systems, to guide the creation of sustainable agricultural, architectural and social systems” (189).

How does Martin Bridge’s definition of permaculture as a “design science” relate to other forms of art? Would you make the claim that permaculture in itself is an art form- why or why not?

1. **Seeds of Solidarity**

In your opinion, is the North Quabbin Garlic and Arts Festival a good example of the intersection between arts and social justice? What do you like about this event, and what would you change?

1. **Serpentine Art and Nature Commons**

After looking through the photos of the art creations in the commons, think about the uniqueness of such an urban setting occupying so much art and nature in the same space. How is the art in communication with the natural world?

* 1. **Environmental program focus**

1. **Sustainable Iowa Land Trust**

“Will showed me and my daughter around the land, and told us about the man who had built the structures, including the house, and then gave them all away, both to protect the land itself and to make farming a viable option for the next generation. After the past few years of isolation and despair, getting to witness this gift was a revelation, a reprieve, and a revival for me” (8).

Rita Mae Reese reflects here on Will’s remarkable sacrifices and care to provide the gift of land for future farmers. Discuss with your group the role of sacrifice, personal and societal, in maintaining a viable environment for the future.

1. **Downeast Salmon Federation**

Reflect on Suzanne Rancourt’s title “At what point is a human parasite too much for even the natural world to recover? (asking for a friend)” (33).

Is there a point? How can we counteract human destruction with human-led rebuilding and rewilding?

1. **Peconic Land Trust**

Peconic Land Trust names creating climate resilience as one of their main focuses. Discuss the ways in which they are devoted to creating more resilient communities, and if their model of achieving such success can be sustainably adapted to help other places as well.

1. **Agrarian Land Trust**

Reflect on the poem *Seeds of Life* on page 56. In what ways can the line “seeds carry the past into futures” be applied to environmental movements?

1. **Community Ecology Institute**

“If this land could speak

its history, what stories

would its dark, tangled roots spell?” (96).

Connect this passage to the topic of environmental justice. Historically marginalized people are filled with examples of environmental injustice, faced at disproportionate rates. If land really could speak, how many of its tales would reflect negatively on human impact?

1. **F.A.R.M.S.**

One passage from *A ‘Lot’ of Land* by Doris Frazier reads,

“Take a look !

Writer/Children Books/

Natural Lotions /Potions

Flower arrangements/ Entertainment” (117).

These can be viewed as examples of getting a broader audience engaged with topics of environmentalism. What are some other creative ways to welcome others by actively joining the movement?

1. **Northeast Farmers of Color**

After reading through *Hyperion Çaca Yvaire: Land and Justice as a Body*, discuss with your group the idea of multi species jurisprudence. Do you agree with this philosophy that all beings are themselves nature, rather than them being a part of nature or something beyond its scope?

1. **Poetry X Hunger**

Think about the mission of Poetry X Hunger, and the intersections that these issues have with ones centered around environmental justice. How can food justice and anti hunger efforts merge together?

1. **AGARTS**

Bringing in artists to create things like zines and visual galleries increases opportunities to form connections with land. Discuss your thoughts on art being the medium that brings people into the environmental movement. What audiences do you think these tactics target and why?

1. **The Milk House Rural Writing Collective**

“The case for small agriculture and land conservation is a different type of argument, however. It is based on environmental concerns and long term benefits to rural communities. It speaks to the social capital behind a better way of treating land, animals and the people between them, and what is important to us as a society” (182).

Ryan Dennis voices here what he thinks should be important to us as a society. How can rural ways of life be seen as viable ways to live, and what would the process look like of shifting familial life to treating land, animals, and people the way he was raised to do?

1. **Martin Bridge**

“If the goal of the Sustainability movement is to nurture a healthier environment for life (to continue) to thrive we must include our minds and spirits and tending to them as a part of our design goals” (193).

Brainstorm some practices to offer to people who struggle to achieve inter connectivity with their environmental goals and with their minds and spirits. Then reflect on whether you are able to impart Martin Bridge’s wisdom on your own endeavors.

1. **Seeds of Solidarity**

During COVID the festival was held virtually, and people voiced their desire to re launch it the following year, yearning for in person connection. As the effects of climate change intensify and pandemics occur, how can we still continue to cultivate connection with people and the environment in virtual settings?

1. **Serpentine Art and Nature Commons**

Each of the photos in this section of the book contain captions detailing the wildlife and biodiversity present in the image. Imagining a broad audience of New Yorkers, do you find it helpful to provide information on the specifics of nature in front of you to more fully appreciate it?