

Ep. 116 | World of Wonders & The Way Through the Woods

[00:00:11] **Kendra** Hello, I'm Kendra Winchester, here with Sachi Argabright. And this is Reading Women, a podcast inviting you to reclaim the bookshelf and read the world. Today, we're talking about our discussion picks, WORLD OF WONDERS and THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS.

[00:00:26] **Sachi** You can find a complete transcript of this episode on our website, readingwomenpodcast.com. And don't forget to subscribe so you don't miss a single episode.

[00:00:36] **Kendra** Well, we are back for more discussions of nature writing and trying to wrangle in Kendra's enthusiasm.

[00:00:45] **Sachi** That's okay. The discussion episode is for your enthusiasm, so let it roll.

[00:00:52] **Kendra** Well, before we jump into that, I did want to give some news updates. So for Patreon, RuthAnn—our wonderful RuthAnn—she does an intense amount of work behind the scenes, so I always love to give her a shout out for all the work that she does. And so one of the things that she does is the Patreon newsletter, and she talks about what she's reading. She has photos of her grumpy Westie, Ted, who has all the old man energy. I love him. He's like if Mr. Wilson from Dennis the Menace were a dog.

[00:01:28] **Sachi** Oh, okay. Yeah. It's a good comparison.

[00:01:30] **Kendra** And he's very adorable. And they go on adventures. And so there's photos of that. There's . . . she loves audiobooks. And she specializes in a lot of nonfiction and middle grade. So.

[00:01:42] **Sachi** Yes. Thank you, RuthAnn. She's wonderful.

[00:01:46] **Kendra** Now we have our guest spot. We needed a little extra time to get it together with everything going on this summer. But I'm so excited to be able to bring it to you in our discussion episode. So before we get into discussing the books, we are joined by Shelby Cole. She is a scientist and an Indigenous woman. She loves to hike and all sorts of things. And when I thought about a scientist to come on to talk about nature and the importance of studying nature in a scientific way and everything that goes with that, Shelby is the first person that came to mind. Of course, all of her contact info, including her Bookstagram, will be linked down in the show notes. And you can go check that out and learn more about her. But without further ado, here is Shelby.

[00:02:34] **Shelby** Hi, I'm Shelby Cole. I'm a grad student right now in college. I am a master's student, getting my cellular, molecular, and microbial biology master's degree in immunology at the University of Montana. I'm an enrolled member of the Gros Ventre Tribe. And I'm also a member of the Little Shell Chippewa Nation. Yeah, you can find me on the internet. I should say the most important things about me. I'm Indigenous, and I'm a scientist. I love to read and hike. And I love to spend time with my dog. And so I was super excited about getting asked to share some of my favorite topics for our nature theme. I think it's important as a scientist that we actually get like kind of good scientific knowledge and not just. . . . I mean, as much as I love nature writing, I think it's also good just to learn more about nature, especially because there's so many . . . I think . . . people have a certain idea about it. But when you actually get into the science of it, forests function

completely differently than how I think people have assumed for a long time. So, yeah, I'm super excited to be chosen.

[00:03:42] **Shelby** The book I've chosen to talk about today is *MIGRATIONS* by Charlotte McConaghy. So this is considered environmental fiction, but really this is like . . . it's so eloquent; it's a step above that even. So, this book is about Franny Stone. She's following the last of the Arctic terns. And she's following them on their last migration from the Arctic to Antarctica. This book is set in the future, but it's really . . . it doesn't even seem like it's the future because it's really like twenty years from now, maybe. So in this future, the wildlife is starting to disappear. The last known wolf died in captivity. There's no more bears. There's no more deers. There's no more bird songs. As a consequence, the fishing industry is starting to go downhill. And so she's on the last fishing vessel that is illegally catching fish because they are . . . because there's so few left. And so she's on that boat, though, to follow the Arctic terns. And throughout the book, we learn a little bit more about Franny, her history.

[00:04:58] **Shelby** And I think the most important details, though, about this book is that it's . . . she so beautifully depicts the grief that we're going to experience without animals. And it comes across in, like, it's little things you don't think about, like waking up in the mornings and you don't hear any birds. Or walking through the forest and there's no squirrels running along the trees. And it's like these little things really affect you. But you don't realize it, I guess.

[00:05:27] **Shelby** So while she's on the boat, though, we learn a little bit more about her and her history and why she's following these Arctic terns. And it's not a spoiler because it's right . . . it's one of the biggest mysteries of the book. We find that this is essentially a suicide mission for Franny. And so I think it really interweaves how nature is so important and impactful to us as humans, but also to us as individuals and how, I think, devastating it'll be when it's gone. And yeah, I think this book just perfectly captures what it's like to live in a time when the world is ending basically, and kind of the internal conversations that you're having with yourself about your culpability in it and the consequences of the actions you and also mankind. But.

[00:06:26] **Shelby** One of my favorite things about this book, though, is that there's a lot of actual science in it. And it was a surprising amount. And as a scientist, I love obviously reading books of fiction that are scientifically accurate. So I was really happy. And so they go a little bit about why she cares about nature. And it was she originally was helping her scientist husband who studied birds. And it kind of just tells how the more you discover about birds and nature, kind of the more radicalized you become because you learn how humankind is destroying it. I should say, though, not just humankind, it's capitalism. But. How capitalism is destroying nature. And you become radicalized just by learning the facts and the science. And I think that's a really compelling read. I think this is a really. . . . This is one of the last books I read of last year, and it was one of my favorites. And it stuck with me months later. And it's a book I will continue to read in the future. So that was *MIGRATIONS* by Charlotte McConaghy. And I highly recommend it.

[00:07:39] **Shelby** So the second pick I've chosen to talk about today is *FINDING THE MOTHER TREE: DISCOVERING THE WISDOM OF THE FOREST* by Suzanne Simard. So this book is from the world's leading forest ecologist. She's also the person who discovered that trees are, like, they basically have connection hubs to like everything around in the forest. And her ideas and the science behind it, her papers, were also then used in *Avatar*, like the biggest movie ever of all time. Yeah, yeah. So *Avatar* was actually

based on some of her findings and her ideas about the forest. So I think like right off the bat, like, yeah, Avatar is kind of real. I mean, like trees are connected. And it's really interesting.

[00:08:31] **Shelby** So this book is . . . this book is a mix. It's a blend of a memoir and also just her speaking about her discoveries and the science behind it and her process kind of just as a woman in science. And I think this is good just for anybody who is questioning how scientists are making these discoveries, basically, and then also the science behind the policies we have as like a Forest Service. And I think, again, this book kind of shows, though, how throughout her career she slowly became radicalized because she found that the policymakers and the scientists weren't listening to her data. And I mean, it's—as she shows—I mean, you can't argue with facts. And so I think this really shows. . . . It's important because it shows (1.) the discrimination women face in science, but then (2.) the discrimination scientists changing the paradigm also face. But specifically, I think this goes into scientists that are changing the way big money operates because her findings show that the way that we are managing forests and the way we are letting lumber companies manage forests is wrong. And so she had published on this for years and decades before it got a lot of traction. And so now she's a world-renowned forest ecologist, but it shows kind of the work she had to put in and the struggle she had to go through to get there.

[00:10:13] **Shelby** She also, I think importantly, she mentions that a lot of her discoveries—well, all of them—were made on Indigenous land. And she also said, so she lived in Kamloops. And so she mentions the residential schools, which is really important. And she mentions, just kind of in general, how Indigenous knowledge has for time immemorial, right, known how to care for the land. We know how to care for our land. But the reason we are in the climate disaster we're in now is because we were not allowed to practice that. And not only that, but it was outlawed. And that . . . it's just . . . it's nice to show that science, all these hundreds of years later, are finally showing that Indigenous scientific ecological knowledge has been right this whole time.

[00:11:06] **Shelby** Some of her forest work was done by prisoners. So that some of the research she did. . . . So what's happened sometimes is, like, prisoners can do work—like, obviously manual labor that nobody else really likes to do. And they do it from very little, like cents on the dollar. And so she . . . they were helping her in her research. And there is an incident. And they decide that they aren't going to do this anymore. And so there's kind of an incident. But she kind of just blows over that. But I just think I would have liked to have seen her take the care she took with the residential schools and the Indigenous knowledge and use that same care to explain how the prison industrial complex is state-sanctioned slavery. That would have been nice. But still, though, this. . . . I still think this is an important book.

[00:12:00] **Shelby** It gets into the science of nature and how trees in nature. . . . We're all interconnected. And forests, specifically, they need each other and they cooperate together. They don't compete. And that's been the prominent, I guess, scientific theory in forest ecology is that plants compete for things. But her science directly shows that they cooperate. They share resources. And by the end of the book, throughout her decade-long career, she finally becomes more radicalized and is being more vocal about the practices of the Canadian government and governments across the world and not listening to Indigenous knowledge keepers and the science. And so I think this book is just important because it shows that scientific journey. There also, though, there is also currently scientists who have always been radical. I mean, I can speak for me personally. The only

reason I went into science was to help my community. And I think . . . I know a lot of scientists, specifically scientists with marginalized identities, that went into science for that reason. And so while it's nice to see that, you know, scientists are taking . . . are slowly becoming more radicalized, I think it's also important to note that a lot of us have always been, I guess, and especially people of color. So that was FINDING THE MOTHER TREE: DISCOVERING THE WISDOM OF THE FOREST by Suzanne Simard.

[00:13:38] **Shelby** I think I was particularly excited to be able to talk about the books I chose for this—for the nature theme—because I think it's particularly hard to find space as an Indigenous person, even like a person with marginalized identity in nature and then also in the writings of nature. Because I think a lot of times that space, I mean, we've seen it co-opted over and over again. And so I sometimes am a little hesitant to pick up nature writing for that reason. And that's sad. And I think these are some good alternatives. They take the care that nature deserves when writing about it. They use the respect and care that I feel like any Indigenous person would take in writing about nature, I think. So if you read these books and are like, wow, you know, we're killing nature, there are some things you can do about it. So there's a ton of Indigenous activists that have been specifically protecting their treaty rights and protecting their water, their drinking water, for not just their communities, but for all communities. And so I think it's important to listen and support Indigenous activists where you can. Specifically, Stop Line 3 is happening. And that, I think in particular, is just time sensitive. It's about 80 percent done. And there's now currently people being convicted for being on their land and trying to stop it, even though it's their land. So there'll be action items linked in the show notes and then any other activists too that recommend you follow or.

[00:15:24] **Kendra** Thanks so much to Shelby for joining us today. Again, you can find all of her information and anything that she has mentioned in her spot linked in the show notes. All right. So now it's time to get into our discussion. So our first discussion pick is WORLD OF WONDERS: IN PRAISE OF FIREFLIES, WHALE SHARKS, and OTHER ASTONISHMENTS by Aimee Nezhukumatathil. And this is out from Milkweed Editions and was Barnes & Noble's Book of the Year in 2020. And I chose this book (1.) because it's gorgeous also. But I heard Jordan Kisner talk to Aimee on Thresholds, which is also a podcast that's part of the LitHub Radio Podcast Network. I listened to it. And I really appreciate the way that Aimee talked about her experience moving around a lot and being a Filipina and Indian American and just her experience loving nature as a woman of color and then growing into her own. So each essay features a plant or an animal or weather . . . some sort of aspect of nature or the natural world. And she then writes about how that connects to her life. So she's sharing personal stories as well as facts about this creature. And she blends them together so well. It created just this beautiful reading experience.

[00:16:55] **Sachi** Yes, absolutely. So I also really enjoyed this book. I flew through it just in a couple sittings. And I really loved and appreciated her thoughts and how she wove her various experiences and tied them into featuring these different plants and animals. And some of them I were very familiar with. And some of them I weren't. But the ones that I were familiar with resonated with me in different ways. And it just shows how the world and nature and the earth, like, can mean so many different things to everyone, which I thought was wonderful.

[00:17:39] **Kendra** So, Sachi, what was one of your favorite essays in the collection?

[00:17:44] **Sachi** Yeah, so I think we briefly mentioned it in our first episode discussing this theme. But the one that sticks out to me the most was the essay about fireflies—or

lightning bugs, as we like to refer to them in the Midwest. And she talks about how her dad taught her a lot about fireflies and would literally pull over on their road trips when they would see kind of a field without a lot of light. And they would try to kind of like engage with the lightning bugs. And I used to do that with my grandparents. So when we first moved to Ohio, when I was like in fifth grade, we grew up in the South and had never seen them before. And so we went in their backyard, got some jars, tried to catch them. And to this day when I see fireflies, I think of my grandparents who are . . . who are both no longer with us. So it just is a nice kind of reminder of my memories of them and first moving to Ohio, which I've now lived in for most of my life. And so hearing about fireflies and learning a little bit more about them, things I didn't know, and then just having that shared experience of having someone, you know, an elder or a parent in the family teaching them about fireflies really resonated with me a lot because that's something that I experienced when I was growing up. So that one's probably one of the ones that stick out the most to me. What about you?

[00:19:25] **Kendra** I very similar memories of my grandparents having the whole lightning-bug experience. And you catch them. And I think the point you made about having a parent or an elder teach you about that is something that resonated with me with a lot of the books that we are talking about because that's where I got my love of nature. And remembering, you know, having that special memory of your grandparents teaching you something like that means that every time you see that thing, that creature or that plant or whatever it is, you remember your grandparents. And that's just the beauty of having someone to teach you about the world around you and to teach you a respect for it as well, which is, I think, an important part of the process that Aimee talks about, particularly with her dad.

[00:20:15] **Sachi** Absolutely. What essay resonated with you the most? Or stuck out to you the most? I know we have a bunch of favorites. But what is one you want to call out kind of first on our discussion?

[00:20:30] **Kendra** So one I wanted to cover was this essay about the peacock. And so she talks about how she had just visited her family in India. And she'd come back to the US, and so she was in school. And they had this assignment to draw an animal or whatever from the natural world. And she chose to write about the peacock. And, you know, she put so much time into it. And she put, like, you know, "The National Bird of India" or something like that at the top. And her teacher was terrible and was like, "This is America. We feature American animals."

[00:21:09] **Sachi** Boo.

[00:21:10] **Kendra** And I'm like, what? Because, like, if you know anything about America, you know that the peacock is here. And in fact, one of, you know, Flannery O'Connor is obsessed with . . . is known for her peacocks. And she's like, very 'Merica. Like. So I just . . . it just blows my mind. And so kind of out of spite, like Aimee, like childhood Aimee, drew this bald eagle . . . like an American flag. And like she won the competition for the. . . .

[00:21:43] **Sachi** Yes.

[00:21:43] **Kendra** I was like, oh my word. But. . . .

[00:21:47] **Sachi** They like hung it . . . they like hung it up and displayed it! Like her, like, retaliation turned into like, "Yes, we love it!" Like, are you joking?

[00:22:00] **Kendra** I, I just. . . It just blows my mind. Like, oh my word. This poor child. And so one of the things that is throughout the book, though, is the peacock. And she talks about how, you know, it was her grandfather or her uncle would gather peacock feathers for her while she was in India. And there's like these stories about the peacock. And that's a recurring image for her that connects her with her Indian heritage. And I really love what she did with that essay because she illustrated, in one essay, her experience being Indian American and, you know, Filipino American in . . . across the United States because they moved a lot. So each different places, it's a very different story connected to it. And almost, you know, she's reconnecting with the land by learning about the animals and the plants around her in her new location. And that connects with her movement, which is very well done throughout the entire book.

[00:22:58] **Sachi** Mm hmm. Yeah. Like she talks about how being a brown girl in Kansas was different than being a brown girl in Ohio and versus like her experience living in Mississippi right now. So it's like. . . It was really interesting to see that was discussed. I feel like, you know, whenever we hear about folks growing up in one specific area of the US and experiencing microaggressions or just flat out racism, it's just from that one viewpoint. And she really talks about various states and various places and environments that she was in and how that informed, you know, where she ends up really calling her "home," you know, when she's older. Which I feel like I haven't really read a lot of books that have various perspectives of living in very different parts of the US and how that affected, you know, childhood experiences. So I really liked that aspect of the book as well.

[00:24:00] **Kendra** Yes, she had such a well-rounded perspective in regards to place, like you said. And one of the things that I really appreciated in an essay called "Cactus Wren" is that her father, no matter where they were, would always try to get them out into nature. And she mentions in passing in the essay that she never saw any other Asian Americans out in nature. And she discusses this more on the podcast episode on Thresholds that I mentioned. But she really kind of wanted to claim this space of loving nature for herself and, you know, maybe other girls like her who didn't see representation might be able to see her work and now have that representation and be able to see, oh, you know, it is okay that, you know, I'm Asian American and love nature because you have that kind of someone to look up to. And that was such a, I think, important moment because so often, you know, people of color are the only person or one of the few people in these nature loving spaces. And that's just not discussed enough in nature writing. And so I really appreciated the way that she's been, you know, been tackling that both in this book and in different interviews and essays.

[00:25:15] **Sachi** Mm hmm. Yeah, I think that's part of the reason why I never really picked up nature writing in, kind of, my reading life because I in recent years have focused so heavily on on different viewpoints and reading books from various marginalized communities, whether it's queer authors or BIPOC authors, things like that. And every time I saw a nature book, it's usually from a white person. So it's like, you know, I'm okay. But when we . . . when we were picking books for the theme for this, you know, this episode, I said, you know, I really want to find some books from non-white authors. And we found some incredible books. And so they're out there. I think they're just harder to find. And I'm glad that we're highlighting them. And I really hope that it leads to more BIPOC authors in this space so we can hear some of their really great perspective on nature because I think there is a lot of opportunity, just not a lot of representation.

[00:26:21] **Kendra** Yeah, yeah, definitely. And, you know, all the books that we chose, as our four picks we chose, are by women of color. And they're there. You just have to look for them a little bit sometimes. And so I also, you know, I wanted to find international things because we are doing an international theme as well. And so we did find a book in translation. It's also Women in Translation Month. And so, you know, I really appreciate, you know, going back to Aimee, I really appreciate the way that she discusses that. And also the animals that she features are from all around the world as well. And so she discusses, you know, some researchers. She'll mention like different things about the cultural heritage of that animal, like this one bird who like in South America, that sounds like someone's dying or their spirit or whatever. Like this bird. Let me tell you. So, like, I went and looked up online. I was like, she's not kidding.

[00:27:28] **Sachi** It sounds like the bird is dying.

[00:27:31] **Kendra** And it's like, okay. And so according to local tradition where the bird is, it's the idea that it's a spirit that's making its way to the afterlife, or it's the spirit wandering the forest. Like there's a lot of, like, cultural traditions around these animals that she touches on. And so obviously the full version of that is in the book. But I really appreciated the way that she also connects the creatures to their local environment and the people who live there.

[00:27:57] **Sachi** Mm hmm. Yeah, absolutely. I feel like there is a focus on some of the plants and animals that she encounters, you know, throughout her life in America. But she also talks about how she tries to engage with nature and, you know, with the different animals in her travels too. So she kind of mentions some trips and vacations that she takes because of the different plants and animals that are in those areas, which I thought was really cool. Like sometimes we plan, you know, I've I've planned a trip around like bookish places to go to. So it's like very similar, you know, taking a trip for food or for books. You can also take a trip to explore nature, too, which I never really have thought about that much or really considered. But it totally makes sense, which I thought was really great that she touched on that.

[00:28:55] **Kendra** Yeah. I love that as well. And she talks a lot about, you know, they go see a whale shark in an aquarium. And she kind of touches on, you know, how ethical it is to keep, you know, large creatures like whale sharks in aquariums. And we've all, you know, we've heard the whole SeaWorld saga with orcas and different things. So she really, I think, brings into that conversation an ethical study of animals as well, a little bit. And of course, people have written a gazillion books on the topic. But I appreciate that she acknowledged that conversation and understanding while visiting an aquarium versus visiting a creature and seeing it out in the wild. And the last one that we have is we both have a lot of personal connections to this experience that she did with her kids, which was have a monarch butterfly or attempt to have a monarch butterfly, you know, move from a [long pause]. . . . I was like "worm"? No. Like from a caterpillar.

[00:30:02] **Sachi** Hahaha! Worm!

[00:30:02] **Kendra** I was like, that's not the right word, Kendra. No.

[00:30:04] **Sachi** They look like worms! You're not far off!

[00:30:05] **Kendra** They do. They do. And then as they get fatter, as they eat the milk weed, you're like, "What is happening to this thing?" And then eventually, the caterpillar

turns into chrysalis. And the idea is that you watch this chrysalis become clear, and you can see the butterfly's wings. And then the butterfly has that huge effort to leave the chrysalis. But their caterpillars—or I guess now butterflies—never left the chrysalis. And it was like this whole experience with her kids that she kind of had to process and explain to them like, well, it didn't make it. And like, she is now the teacher, in that sense.

[00:30:45] **Sachi** Exactly. Yeah. I think. . . . I don't know how common it is in other other places, but I feel like at least you know, where I've grown up, it's always kind of like a little kind of take-home project or experiment that you could do at home to see the transformation of a butterfly. And yeah, I feel like I've had that experience where, you know, when you're younger, you're like, when is it going to wake up? And it just doesn't sometimes. And I think that's part of of nature too. You know, there's . . . it's like super cliché, but like the circle of life. Like sometimes things, you know, nature . . . nature doesn't intend for everything . . . or even like short lifespans, you know, lifespans of certain plants and animals are so much shorter. And there's purpose and reason behind that. I feel like I kind of struggled with that as a child to be like, wait, so they don't live as long as we do? And it's like, no, because sometimes that's not always, you know, what's necessary. And so I think that's important to teach children and such that, you know, the world around them also looks and feels a little different when it comes to the life cycle versus us as humans. So I thought that was a good essay to touch on that experience of passing down her love of nature down to her kids, just like her father did with her.

[00:32:18] **Kendra** Well, that is *WORLD OF WONDERS: IN PRAISE OF FIREFLIES, WHALE SHARKS, AND OTHER ASTONISHMENTS* by Aimee Nezhukumatathil. And that is out from Milkweed Editions. And huge shout out to Milkweed Editions. I love their books, so definitely check them out. I will include a link to their website in the show notes. And Sachi, you have our second discussion pick.

[00:32:42] **Sachi** My discussion pick today is called *THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS: OF MUSHROOMS AND MOURNING* by Long Litt Woon. And this is translated from Norwegian by Barbara J. Haveland. And that is out from Spiegel and Grau. And just a quick synopsis in case you missed our last episode. Long Litt Woon discovers, you know, just one day when after her husband had left for work, that he suddenly passes away. And she finds herself in a really deep and depressive state. And the thing that pulls her out of her kind of grief is mushroom hunting and really helps her move on from the loss of her husband. And so Long Litt Woon is an anthropologist. And she emigrated from Malaysia to Norway. And so I feel like she offers this really great and unique perspective and even talks about mushrooming cultures in different countries in comparison to Norway, where she's at. And there were so many fun mushroom facts I learned through this book. And I feel like there . . . this book has so much to offer. Like here's my mushroom knowledge, you know, before this book: I see a mushroom, like, in the grocery store. I say, okay, this is . . . I need this for a recipe or whatever. And I sometimes see some funky mushrooms like in my lawn and when I go, like, you know, on a hiking trail or a walking trail in the woods. And so I knew, like, nothing about mushrooms. Like, Kendra, did you know of a lot about mushrooms before reading this book?

[00:34:32] **Kendra** I knew very . . . I knew very little more than what you just mentioned. I love cooking them. And I love making things with them. But now that she's talked so disparagingly of how bland, like, grocery store mushrooms taste, I'm like, man, I need to go out and change this.

[00:34:52] **Sachi** Exactly. So I mentioned it a little bit on the last episode, but my experience is I'm not really into mushrooms. Like, I'm not really a fan. I don't really like the texture. But then after reading this, I'm like, well, maybe I just need to try a wild mushroom? I don't know if like I'm just like eating the gross ones or the not great ones and like, my life will be better if I get like a wild mushroom? But as a mushroom lover and eater, Kendra, do you feel compelled to try mushroom hunting to like expand out into more types of mushrooms to cook with?

[00:35:27] **Kendra** I would definitely consider supporting a mushroom forager.

[00:35:35] **Sachi** Sponsoring one, getting a cut of their mushrooms.

[00:35:38] **Kendra** Well, I know like some farmers markets have mushroom foragers, you know, there. Or like smaller. . . . Folks like that that to go do that. But like, she puts, like, she puts forth like the entire thing she did to get certified as like an a mushroom inspector. So when people will go foraging, the inspectors make sure they haven't brought out a poisonous mushroom just to make sure everyone's safe. So when she gets certified for this, like, it's a huge process. There's a test. You know, there are classes, et cetera. And so I'm like, that's a lot of dedication, but I will support someone's efforts.

[00:36:16] **Sachi** But what I found interesting was like I think Norway is one of the only countries that does the certification process, I think she noted. Like they're like. . . . They take it the most seriously. And they have to memorize like 150 species or something of mushrooms to get certified. So I'm like, if we don't do that in the States, like, yeah, like I don't. . . . How do you, I guess, there's no, like, real certification for us over here as to like making sure that you know your mushroom knowledge, I guess.

[00:36:51] **Kendra** That's true. And you're not like buying a random poisonous mushroom at the farmer's market.

[00:36:56] **Sachi** I know, right? So I thought all of it was very fascinating. Like one of the first things that she mentions, like in the very introductory phases of the mushroom kind of chapters, is that, you know, mushrooms are commonly associated with plants, but they are more characteristic of animals because like they have like these networks and such of where they grow and things like that. And previously there was a subcategory in the animal kingdom for mushrooms. And it was called like "chaos" or like was the Latin word for "chaos" or something. And now it doesn't even belong in the animal kingdom. And she notes that it's in its own kingdom because it's not plant or animal. And I didn't know that. I thought they were plants. Like I just like . . . even within the first couple chapters, I learned like just all kinds of mushroom knowledge that I didn't know before. And so what was like the most interesting thing that you learned about mushrooms in this book, Kendra? Or maybe one of the most interesting things.

[00:38:05] **Kendra** I really found it interesting that there's an appropriate way to cook each type of mushroom to get the best flavor out of it. So, for example, she notes that, you know, in Norway, there's a very specific way of cooking mushrooms, oftentimes is frying them. And so she notes that you should saute them in a dry pan and then add butter or oil. So she notes that, you know, in Malaysia, they use, you know, soy sauce and sesame oil. So it just depends on where you are and what you're cooking. And I really appreciated that because she talks about the flavor of the mushrooms a ton. There's like a whole . . . there's a whole section on, like, the aroma of mushrooms and how that connects to taste. And there's charts. And like it connects to the whole wine. . . . Like, you know, how wine

tasters have this whole vocabulary they used to describe the taste of mushroom—my word—to describe the taste of a wine that they have. And then mushroom folks have their own vocabulary. And she compares it across countries. It's like this whole thing. And I was just blown away of her research. Like.

[00:39:14] **Sachi** Yes!

[00:39:14] **Kendra** That. Wow. There's a . . . there's a chart and stuff. Like what?

[00:39:20] **Sachi** Yeah, like she does like this whole. . . . And I think her being an anthropologist, like, helps with this too. Right? Of like researching these things and and helping communicate, you know, these different aspects of, in this case, the mushroom community. But she, like, gets a panel of like aromatic people. I think like she had a connection to someone like in the fragrance industry. And they had like a panel of people who are like experts in the area of like aromas and fragrances and had them attribute what they think the fragrance of a mushroom would be versus what they use as like the Norwegian language or its kind of standard shorthand of like a certain smell that goes with a certain mushroom. And some were aligned, and some were not. And so, yeah, just very fascinating in how, like, different mushrooms have different taste profiles and, you know, the whole thing around, like, how mushrooms have look-alikes and how you have to be careful because some look-alikes can be poisonous and then some look-alikes don't even taste the same. And all of it was like very, very fascinating.

[00:40:31] **Sachi** And I was just thinking, like a mushroom is a mushroom. And like, they all maybe look different, but they don't . . . they probably still taste the same. And when she talked about, like, there's a whole chapter on, like, her recommendations or her thoughts of like her dream dinner would be to serve from appetizer to dessert, a different dish that features a different type of mushroom. And I thought that, like, thinking of dessert with mushroom. . . ? And she's like . . . and she says this chuckling, like, I know it might sound strange, but there are some great mushrooms that would be good for dessert and better for sweeter palates. I would have never thought that there would be certain mushrooms that you could serve with dessert. And so . . . so much mushroom knowledge. Everyone's probably like, why are they still talking about mushrooms? But I thought it was really cool.

[00:41:25] **Kendra** Yeah. And you and I both love cooking. You know, if we were not, as a side podcast, if we didn't do the corgi podcast, we would do a cooking podcast. Basically.

[00:41:33] **Sachi** Yes.

[00:41:33] **Kendra** And so that's like the other half of our conversations, you know. And I really love this from an ingredient perspective because there's this very hipster version of the farm-to-table movement. But I really appreciate her very down-to-earth, foraging perspective on mushrooms and this very intense knowledge of appreciating products. And so when we go buy products that people have found that are maybe heritage varieties of vegetables and the work that that farmer put into it or the forager who found the mushrooms or whatever it might be, respecting all of the effort and expertise that went into it, and maybe you think about where my food comes from in a new way, not just in regards to mushrooms, but like all the products that I buy, if that makes sense. And so I really loved it from a cooking perspective.

[00:42:24] **Sachi** She talks about, you know, that kind of euphoria and kind of like excitement she feels when she finds a new mushroom that she has never tasted before and how excited she is to kind of like, dust it off and like try to get it all cleaned up before she takes it home and then puts all this love and care into like cooking it, frying it, tasting it, seeing how it could work in different recipes. And that is something, as someone who does love cooking, something that I really appreciated because a lot of what I do is I go to the grocery store and get food. Like I'm horrible at gardening. And I've tried various times to no success, but kind of knowing where food comes from and even finding it yourself and like exploring the earth to find a new type of plant or type of ingredient that you can literally go ahead and try and taste at home, I thought was such a cool thing that, you know, is I think unique and probably something that a lot of people don't think about. They just kind of think, you know. . . .

[00:43:33] **Sachi** We almost, I think, sometimes forget that like, you know, produce and certain meats and stuff, they they come from plants and animals that are grown and harvested and, you know, killed and such for our consumption. I think some people just think it comes from a factory, and it's not actually a living thing at some point in time. And it's just a really good reminder that, you know, you can get something from the ground into your plate. And that, you know, we should probably have a greater appreciation for food and where it comes from. Like in Japan, there's a phrase before you eat every meal, it's "itadakimasu." And that means, literally means, like "thank you to the farmers and to the people who allow us to put this food on the table and who put hard work for us to consume this meal" is the essence of that phrase. And I feel like sometimes that gets lost, at least in America. And I really appreciated how she highlights that in this book.

[00:44:37] **Kendra** Yeah, 100 percent. And I think that goes back to understanding and respecting nature and where our food comes from, even down to mushrooms. And I feel like this definitely goes in the broader sense of understanding what is around you. And what she has done is understanding mushrooms. So she has hyperfocused. But she is understanding where these come from and respecting the ingredient. And she talks about, you know, the secret mushroom spots that all these different characters have. And it's like a whole thing. And I really could feel her enthusiasm and joy in foraging throughout the whole book and her respect for finding a rare mushroom. And it was just something that I feel like we could definitely take those concepts and apply to, you know, other ingredients that we find that, you know, we use to make, you know, our food. And I just love that about the book.

[00:45:39] **Sachi** Yeah, absolutely, so we probably could go on forever about mushrooms.

[00:45:47] **Kendra** Probably.

[00:45:47] **Sachi** But we will spare our audience before we dive too deep down the mushroom rabbit hole. But. Rabbit hole, pun intended that time. So that was our second discussion pick, *THE WAY THROUGH THE WOODS: OF MUSHROOMS AND MOURNING* by Long Litt Woon. And that is translated by Barbara J. Haveland. And that's out from Spiegel and Grau.

[00:46:13] **Kendra** So those are our two discussion picks. And so of course we have further reading because there are just so many great books out there that we could have talked about. So if you're looking for more, we have a list for you.

[00:46:27] **Sachi** Yeah, so I'll go first. The first further reading I have is called THE HOUR OF LAND: A PERSONAL TOPOGRAPHY OF AMERICA'S NATIONAL PARKS. And this is by Terry Tempest Williams. So this book has been described as part memoir, part natural history, and part social critique and really focuses on America's national parks. And, really, Terry Tempest Williams talks about her experiences going to these parks. And she is focused on studying nature as well. And I still have yet to pick this one up, and I'm very excited to pick it up because I've visited a couple of national parks and very much enjoyed my experiences and want to learn more about the various national parks that America has to offer. So that's my first further reading.

[00:47:22] **Sachi** And the second one is WILD: FROM LOST TO FOUND ON THE PACIFIC CREST TRAIL by Cheryl Strayed. And this is a memoir about how hiking helped re-center Cheryl Strayed when she kind of hits rock bottom in her twenties, I believe, and really helps her pull her out of her, kind of, depressive state when she needed it most. And I read this right after I moved back from the Bay Area of California. And I was like, oh, you know, I wish I would have known about all these great things about the Pacific Crest Trail before I moved back to the Midwest. And she hikes very many miles. And a lot of people are like, you are . . . you have not prepared enough to do this. And she does it all on her own, toughs it out. And I said, you know, it takes an incredible person to do that. So it was very fascinating. If you're into hiking and into like long-distance hiking, this is definitely the book for you. Kendra, what is your further reading?

[00:48:35] **Kendra** So I have a few books on my TBR that I wanted to mention. So one of them is MOUNTAINS PILED UPON MOUNTAINS: APPALACHIAN NATURE WRITING IN THE ANTHROPOCENE, edited by Jessica Cory. And a lot of people don't know this, but there is a lot of environmental work happening in Appalachia. Protesting mountaintop removal. A lot of Appalachia does not have clean drinking water. There's a lot going on that I don't think a lot of people realize. What this is, is fifty writers have contributed pieces of fiction and nonfiction and poetry that really capture different aspects of Appalachia, which, of course, extends, you know, from New York State all the way down to northern Georgia and northern Alabama. So it's a vast region with a lot of different kinds of nature. And so I really appreciated them looking at the broad scope of Appalachia instead of like, I guess, what the general populace thinks of as Appalachia.

[00:49:34] **Kendra** Another one I want to recommend is OAK FLAT: A FIGHT FOR SACRED LAND IN THE AMERICAN WEST by Lauren Redniss. And this is about the fight for sacred land from the Apache. And Oak Flat is sacred mesa. And then a mining company came in and just took over and started destroying their sacred land. And so this is a look at the fight for that land. And the author is a settler. But I have seen a number of Indigenous folks positively review this book. And the book itself has a lot of illustrations. If you're listening to the audiobook, there is a PDF with the illustrations as well. And so it's just a gorgeous object. And it really points out that these fights for sacred land that Indigenous folks are still doing today. I mean, you have Stop Line 3 happening in northern Minnesota right now. And I will include a link to that as well as these books. But it's really important that we support Indigenous people as their treaty rights are being violated by corporations to steal their natural resources or, you know, to build pipelines under them, which is not healthy for the environment and different things like that. So those are some recommendations. And of course, they will all be linked in the show notes. Do not worry. You don't have to remember all of those titles. So there is our enthusiastic discussion of all things, flora, fauna, and everything in between. Sachi, where can people find you about the internet?

[00:51:17] **Sachi** Yeah, so people can find me on the internet, mainly on Instagram (@sachireads).

[00:51:22] **Kendra** And everyone can find me (@kdwinchester). And those, of course, will be linked in the show notes as well. And that's our show. Many thanks to our patrons, whose support makes this podcast possible. This episode was produced and edited by me, Kendra Winchester, with music by Miki Saito and Isaac Greene.

[00:51:42] **Sachi** Join us next time when Kendra and Jaclyn talk about books around the theme of incarceration. In the meantime, you can find Reading Women on Instagram and Twitter (@thereadingwomen). Thanks for listening.