



Castro Valley Reads 2022 Discussion Guide

Discussion leaders: Feel free to pick and choose from among these questions or create your own.

General questions:

- Did you read both books? If yes, how did they capture your imagination in different ways? If no, how did you decide which book to read?
- In the Bay Area, water shortages and poor air quality have been attributed to climate change. What other effects of climate change have you personally seen or experienced?
- Some people who live in urban/suburban areas think of “nature” and the “environment” as something that is “out there.” They think the “environment” is something we should protect, but they don’t often feel connected to or dependent on the natural world. How do both books show us otherwise?
- The effects of climate change are unfolding over a long period of time. The models about what the world could look like in 30 to 50 years are only predictions. For many people, climate change doesn’t feel like an immediate threat. Since people and institutions react best to immediate threats, what’s needed to build a sustained response to climate change?

Questions about *Fire in Paradise*:

- How would you describe the town of Paradise and surrounding area before the fire?
- What stood out to you about the causes of the wild fire, both the immediate and underlying causes?
- The authors noted that researchers have called California a “gigantic hearth.” Fires have always burned here. Even in the long ago past, fires were deliberately set by indigenous people as a land management technique. What did you learn from the book about how the state’s climate and wildfire activity has changed over time?
- According to the book, Pacific Gas & Electric equipment caused the Camp Fire. Do they deserve all the blame for this and other major fires? Their main strategy to mitigate disaster seems to be power shut-offs. What toll does that take on its customers?
- The author’s account of the tragic fire is built on dozens of deeply personal stories, stories of heartbreak and of heroism. Which stories were most memorable for you?
- Think about the town’s preparedness to avert such a disaster, especially its evacuation plan and emergency alert system. Did Paradise seem well prepared for a major fire? What are the implications for disaster planning in any community?
- We learn in the afterword to the book that some of Paradise has been rebuilt, do you think should it be? One third of homes in California are surrounded by or adjacent to wildlands. Should people be

living there? Or is it too late to ask that question? Should we keep pushing into the wildlands and zoning areas for housing?

- What are the challenges people face, materially and emotionally, in an area recovering from a disaster?
- What questions does the book raise about housing insecurity and affordability?
- One way to protect homes from wildfire is to build “defensible space” around homes and to manage vegetation to insure power line safety. What is the potential effect of less vegetation on our ability to address climate change?
- On pg. 205 Paradise council member Mike Zuccolillo says, “We as a nation don’t value maintenance, we don’t value infrastructure, we don’t value getting ahead of it. We don’t really do anything until there’s a serious problem.” Do you agree with his viewpoint? How might that affect our ability to adapt to or even halt climate change?
- How did social networks and connections among neighbors play a role in the response to the fire as well as the town’s recovery?
- What signs of hope can you take away from this story?

Questions about *Earth Keeper*:

- Is there a passage from the book that has stayed with you? Is there a page or phrase that you marked?
- Can a sense of wonder and a reverence for nature inspire us to live more sustainably and engage in climate change activism?
- Consider your immediate surroundings, your yard, your neighborhood, your local parks. Focus on something specific that is not human-made, like trees, the wind, the sky, insects, other animals. Describe what you are seeing. On page 38, Momaday writes “You will become one with what you see. Consider what it is to be seen.” What does he mean by that?
- If you were to write a poem or short essay in praise of a landscape or a wonder of nature, where/what would you choose and why?
- In the author’s note, Momaday writes that this book is “a declaration of belonging.” What did you learn from this book about the importance of the land to indigenous people?
- The connection with previous and future generations is very important to Momaday. If you have young people in your life, have you been able to share a sense of wonder about the natural world?
- On page 40, Momaday writes, “will I give my children an inheritance of the earth? Or will I give them less than I was given?” Are we in danger of giving our children less than we were given? How did you feel after reading those lines?
- On page 37 Momaday writes, “the earth does not want shame. It wants love.” What does he mean by this? How do you feel about that?
- What could it mean to be a keeper of the earth? Are you an Earth Keeper? How so?