

Humility, Caring and Wisdom Make a Better Future Possible



In the face of uncertainty, nature brings solace and sustenance. ([Photo: Tory Johnson via Unsplash](#))

By [David Suzuki](#) | [Common Dreams](#)

In the face of uncertainty, nature brings solace and sustenance. Research shows [time spent in forests](#) – and even just looking at trees or photos of them – boosts immune systems, lowers blood pressure, reduces stress, improves mood and ability to focus, and increases energy levels and sleep quality.

As we consider the natural world, we must remember that how we talk about it matters. [Steven Nitah](#), former elected chief of Lutsel K'e Dene First Nation and a four-time member of the Northwest Territories legislative assembly, says shifting our language can help [shift our understanding](#). “We need to re-do land use plans. We need to rebuild those plans as land-relationship plans,” he says, urging us to re-imagine and re-

orient our relationship with nature – to manage for abundance based on reciprocity and to recognize our responsibilities to the land, water, and air.

As a society, we continue to exceed biological limits, which increases our species' collective exposure to risk. With climate disruption, our refusal to contain carbon emissions has put our well-being and survival at risk.

In his essay "[The year America melted down,](#)" Omar El Akkad observes, "Mask-wearing has become politicized, just as school shootings became politicized, just as climate change became politicized, just as an instance of communal survival at the expense of personal profit inevitably becomes politicized."

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Things that shouldn't be politicized are, but El Akkad argues battle lines continue to be drawn around issues that pit individual rights against responsibilities to uphold the common good. Individual rights only matter in the commons, though, and so must include responsibility.

In times of compounded crises – a pandemic, crippling racism, rising inequity, and escalating climate risk – we can no longer afford to listen to advocates of narrow self-interest or those who falsely claim that favoring the wealthy and powerful will send benefits trickling down to the rest. In Canada, the most affluent 0.5 percent of families now [hold 20.5 percent](#) of the wealth – some \$2.4 trillion – and [income inequality continues to grow.](#)

If, as El Akkad says, polarization is rising between those who champion individual rights to profit and those who believe in the collective responsibility to people and the planet, we must make explicit choices to work toward equity, inclusivity, and a more balanced relationship with the natural world.

We have the chance to invest in and create a better future. Why wouldn't we choose this path? What stands in our way?

To envision new ways and to act differently, we need to co-create stories of what is possible and worthwhile.

In her book [*Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge, and the Teachings of Plants*](#), ethnobotanist, professor and Citizen Potawatomi Nation member [Robin Wall Kimmerer](#) encourages us to recognize the world as a gift. Humility, she says, will help us make better choices.

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Stories have always helped humans make sense of the world, and Kimmerer says they're strong tools for restoring the land and our relationship to it. "We need to unearth the old stories that live in a place and begin to create new ones, for we are story makers, not just storytellers." We have the power to tell different stories that help right our relationships and better enable us to work for the good of all.

Although everyone can benefit from the wisdom in Indigenous Peoples' stories, Kimmerer cautions against wholesale appropriation. We must take inspiration from the old stories and build more balanced narratives about relationships between people, place, and planet.

The choice isn't as complex as some might have us believe. We can choose humility, caring, and wisdom based on knowledge gained from Indigenous Peoples, scientists, and experts, and shoulder the responsibilities to each other and Earth through our actions – creating a better future for all. Or we can continue on as we have, knowing that the crises we face will worsen.

Humanity's ability to take the first path lies in the values we choose, the stories we tell ourselves, and the strength of the relationships we are willing to build with each other and Earth.



[David Suzuki](#), an award-winning geneticist, and broadcaster, co-founded the [David Suzuki Foundation](#) in 1990. He was a faculty member at the University of British Columbia and is currently professor emeritus. Suzuki is widely recognized as a world leader in sustainable ecology and has received numerous awards for his work, including a UNESCO prize for science and a United Nations Environment Program medal.

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