



The FREE “Read/Reflect/Create” club was a series of five real-time reading sessions every Tuesday in July 2024 (July 2, 9, 16, 23 and 30), running from 6:30 to 8:30 PM EST.

Together, we explored diverse readings centered on beavers. Following each reading session, we participated in a creative prompt and engaged in reflective discussions.

These creative prompts aim to activate storytelling centered around these ecosystem engineers, their impact on the water cycle, the landscapes they shape, the biodiversity they cultivate and more. The prompts represent an origin point for you to explore your relationship with beavers through art. Whether you prefer poetry, drawing, painting, printmaking, embroidery, essays, or another medium, the opportunities for self-expression and exploration are endless.

Read/Reflect/Create Club Format:

- 60 minutes: Collective Reading in Real Time from the Screen (the facilitator shares the reading)
- 30 minutes: Personal Reflection on the Prompt (silent with sound and video off)
- 30 minutes: Collective Conversation & Sharing

Visit this [webpage](#) to learn more about the program. In addition to the Read/Reflect/Create club, there was a panel discussion on beavers, with presentations from Lorén M. Spears, Narragansett Tribal citizen and Executive Director of Tomaquag Museum; Ben Goldfarb, environmental journalist and author; Dr. Emily Fairfax, Assistant Professor of Geography at the University of Minnesota; and Jasmine Gutbrod, Environmental Artist and Educator, followed by a Q&A session.

You can access the webinar recording [here](#) using the passcode Beavers2024!

These events were presented by [Creature Conserve](#) and organized and facilitated by Alexandra Ionescu, a Creature Conserve 2024 Curatorial Fellow. Any questions? Please reach out to alexandra@creatureconserve.com

Week 1

July 2nd, 2024

Readings:

- [What Goes Inside A Beaver Pond?](#) By Becky Cushing Gop, illustrated by Carrie Shryock
- **Prologue: Ktsi Amiskw, The Story of the Great Beaver** from [Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America](#) by Leila Philip

Prompt:

1. What brought you here today?
2. How would you describe your connection with beavers?
3. What did you know about beavers before today?
4. Do you have a story about your first encounter with beavers?
5. Are there beavers near your area?
6. What do you want to learn more about next month?
7. What was memorable about today's readings?

Week 2

July 9th, 2024

Readings:

- **Chapter 1: At the Beaver Pond** from [Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America](#) by Leila Philip
- **Chapter 2: On the Trap Line** from [Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America](#) by Leila Philip (pages 13-19)

Prompt:

Choose one prompt to respond to it through your medium of choice:

1. "Beavers are a keystone species, an organism so critical to the survival of a biological community that they function like the keystone in a medieval archway, the one shaped block that forms the apex of the arch and upon which the entire span of bricks depends. Remove the keystone and the arch collapses. [...] They are forest Shiva, destroying illusion to create insight, putting into motion cycles of growth and regrowth, creation through destruction." Leila Philip, *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* (page 9, Kindle Edition)
2. "In North America, beaver dams, ponds and waterworks established hydraulic systems that created much of the rich biodiversity of the continent. That was the primordial Beaverland – North America before European colonization, when as many as four hundred million beavers filled the continent." Leila Philip, *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (page 18, Kindle Edition)

Week 3
July 16th, 2024

Readings:

- **Chapter 7: Lewis Henry Morgan and the Great Beaver Dam** from [*Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America*](#) by Leila Philip (pages 134 - 142)
- **Chapter 8: Kitaiksisskstaki and The Story of the Beaver Bundle** from [*Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America*](#) by Leila Philip

Prompt:

Choose one prompt to respond to it through your medium of choice:

1. "Then I see it. Just behind the next stand of bushes, a huge mound of sticks and mud juts up from the surface of the water in the iconic pyramid, a beaver lodge. We walk up until the water grows too deep to fade further. We are about five feet from the lodge, which from this close up looks like a huge pile of pickup sticks. Saplings stripped of bark are crisscrossed and interwoven with branches, wider at the base and tapered at the top so that the lodge takes on an almost perfect teepee shape and rises up a good eight feet from the surface of the water." Chapter 2: On the Trap Line from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (pages 13-19, Kindle Edition)

Can you create an imaginary map featuring a beaver-made dam, pond, or lodge—or all of them? What questions arise about the decision-making of beavers during this process? How do they gather and arrange materials? Do they prefer certain trees as a construction material?

2. "You are trying to get answers by looking at the individual when the intelligence of it and the engineering comes from collective intelligence [...] It comes from a collective, from hundreds if not thousands of beavers working independently on a waterway, and the end looks very intelligent. The beaver dams Morgan was studying took generations of beavers to build." Chapter 8: Kitaiksisskstaki and The Story of the Beaver Bundle from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (page 153, Kindle Edition)
3. What are the most important lessons you've gained from the beaver so far?

Week 4
July 23rd, 2024

Readings:

- **Chapter 9: The Underwater People** from [*Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America*](#) by Leila Philip

Prompt:

Choose one prompt to respond to it through your medium of choice:

How have beavers influenced your understanding of transformation, the water cycle, and the movement of water across the Earth's surface? How has your perception of water been transformed by beavers?

"Dr. Burchsted then began to ask, what if our vision of rivers in the Northeast as free-flowing was based not on the river's natural state but on years of study of rivers that were already degraded? [...] In other words, before European colonization, the streams of New England were not single-channel, but rather smaller, branching channels within a system of extensive wetlands." Chapter 9 : The Underwater People from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (pp. 227-228 Kindle Edition)

"By transforming from pond to meadow, the beaver site allows for grasses, then shrubs, then trees to recolonize the area—this disruption brings vitalization, and creates habitat for creatures like rabbit, grouse, moose, and deer that need dry land."Chapter 9 : The Underwater People from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (page 238, Kindle Edition)

"In her book *Disconnected Rivers: Linking Rivers to Landscape*, Dr. Wohl points out the ways in which rivers are not static but instead are impacted by weather and geology and inevitably adjust, becoming less and less that classic vision of a single rushing channel of water. Rather, left to its own preferences, a river naturally widens, flattens out into a series of braided channels as sediment deposits—carried down especially in times of flooding to create, over time, a series of islands around which the water must flow. Thinking of a river as an ecosystem means not just connecting the channel to the land through which it flows, but taking into consideration the needs and health of the organisms that live in the various zones of the river, particularly the photosynthetic organisms like algae and bacteria as well as the less famous protists, all of which serve as the basis of the food web. Chapter 9 : The Underwater People from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (page 241, Kindle Edition)

Week 5

July 30th, 2024

Readings:

- **Chapter 13: Thinking Like a Watershed** Part 1 from [Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America](#) by Leila Philip
- **Chapter 15: Kintsugi** from [Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America](#) by Leila Philip

Suggested:

- [Beaver Made: The Botany of a Keystone Species](#) by Rob Rich (from a Newsletter sent by the North American Plant Society)

Prompt:

Respond to the prompt through your medium of choice:

Consider how beavers transform and heal ecosystems through their ways of being. In what ways does this process reflect the philosophy of kintsugi, which emphasizes the beauty and value of repair and embraces imperfections? Can acts of repair truly enhance what was once broken? How might ecological restoration and collaboration with living systems be viewed as forms of mending?

Reflect on the following quote to guide your exploration:

"When beavers have a problem, like a leaking dam, anything to hand - sticks, rocks, mud, grass, chunks of log, a hubcap, strands of telephone wire — becomes part of that solution and gets stuffed into that hole in the dam. And when the dam is breached yet again, they swim right back out to fix it. [...] These brooks and streams and creeks, shifted and lengthened and bulged, like the one before me, were our seams of gold; they were beavers at work, repairing our broken landscapes." Chapter 15: Kintsugi from *Beaverland: How One Weird Rodent Made America* by Leila Philip (page 331-332, Kindle Edition)