

WHAT TO KNOW ABOUT AIMEE NEZHUKUMATATHIL



Aimee Nezhukumatathil is an acclaimed writer, editor, and professor based in Mississippi. Her first essay collection, *World of Wonders* (2020), was named Barnes & Noble's Book of the Year, became a *New York Times* Bestseller, and was a finalist for the Kirkus Prize in nonfiction. Nezhukumatathil has also published four highly celebrated poetry collections, earning awards such as the Gold Medal from the Independent Publisher Book Awards, the Balcones Prize, the Tupelo Prize, *ForeWord Magazine's* Book of the Year, and the Global Filipino Award. Her work has appeared in prestigious outlets including *The New York Times Magazine*, *American Poetry Review*, *ESPN*, and the *Best American Poetry* series. She has received fellowships from US Artists, the MacDowell Arts Colony, and the Mississippi Arts Commission. In addition to her writing, Nezhukumatathil has served as an editor for *Poets & Writers*, *Orion*, and *Sierra* magazines. Currently, she teaches English at the University of Mississippi and travels widely as a poetry ambassador, sharing her work and promoting literature both across the United States and internationally.



QUESTIONS: *WORLD OF WONDERS* (2020)

- Nezhukumatathil repeatedly compares the natural habits of various flora and fauna to her own life. In which essays does she do this, and what connections does she make between the two?
- Where and how does Nezhukumatathil compare the natural world to human nature more broadly?
- How does Nezhukumatathil use metaphors, similes, and analogies to describe different plants and animals?
- As a second-generation immigrant, Nezhukumatathil recounts many instances of racism and xenophobia that both she and her family have experienced. Which instances stand out to you, and why?
- In which stories are Nezhukumatathil's perceptions of plants or animals challenged?
- In "Peacock," how does Nezhukumatathil's understanding of peacocks contradict her teacher's? What does this say about both individuals?
- What does "Southern Cassowary" suggest about humans' relationship to animals and to each other?

MAKING CONNECTIONS

- What other nature writers have you read? How does Nezhukumatathil approach writing about nature differently from other authors?
- Where else have you seen writers connect animals, plants, and natural phenomena to other people or themselves? How are these natural elements useful or relevant when exploring the human condition?
- Marguritte Sheffer's *The Man in the Banana Trees* explores similar subjects of ecological dangers and frequently uses animals as central images. Discuss how these elements are used in fiction vs. nonfiction.

COMMUNITY RESOURCES

- [The Nature Conservatory](#)
- [NatureServe](#)
- [United We Dream](#)
- [Stop AAPI Hate](#)
- [Sierra Club](#)
- [GreenPeace](#)
- [350.org](#)
- [Earth Day Network](#)
- [The Conservation Fund](#)

LITERATURE AS PRAXIS

- What animal species, plant species, or part of the ecosystem is most at risk in your area? What are the root causes of these risks? How can you address these issues on a local level?
- How can you contribute to global efforts to protect endangered species and maintain environmental sustainability?
- What preconceptions do you have about the natural world or specific species, and how can you interrogate those beliefs?
- Where do you see microaggressions and prejudice in your own life? What can you do to prevent such injustices and foster understanding?
- How can you use your skills, knowledge, or resources to educate others about environmental or social issues in your community?

ADDITIONAL READINGS

- David Foster Wallace, *Consider the Lobster* (2005)
- Marguritte Sheffer, *The Man in the Banana Trees* (2024)
- William Stolzenburg, *Where the Wild Things Were* (2008)
- Henry David Thoreau, *Walden* (1854)
- Ayumu Watanabe, *Children of the Sea* (2020)