

Becoming Good Ancestors

[Skywoman] came here with nothing but a handful of seeds and the slimmest of instructions to “use your gifts and dreams for good,” the same instructions we all carry....Knowing her grandchildren would inherit the world she left behind, she did not work for flourishing in her time only.

—Robin Wall Kimmerer, *Braiding Sweetgrass*, pp. 8–9

What kind of world are you creating or helping to create? In the quote above, Potawatomi botanist, author, and relative Robin Wall Kimmerer describes Skywoman as an elder, scattering seeds, knowing they will benefit the people and generations who come after her. North American Indigenous communities, including the Anishnaabe and the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, speak to the power of present and future living through the Principle of Seven Generations. This Seven Generations principle invites individuals and communities to think long into the future about the world they are seeding, harvesting, and leaving for future generations of themselves to inherit, flourish, and continue to create.

For this year’s Promising Young Writers prompt, we invite you to consider this concept of being and becoming a good ancestor:

- What does it mean to be a good ancestor and to think about the generations that will come after you, your family, your community, and your peers?
- What lessons have you learned from your ancestors, and how are you bringing those lessons to your communities?
- Thinking about action, what can you, your family, your community, and/or your peers *do*, to be and become good ancestors?
- Thinking about the Skywoman, what are you creating now that will continue to grow after you?

We invite you to think about times when you could take action toward a better world, even when it was hard or would not directly benefit you—even when restoring right relationships between humans, the self, or the earth may mean you will never experience the futures you seed. Whether planting trees that you may never sit under, speaking out against discrimination and structural inequity, protesting unjust laws, sharing your stories, preserving your language and culture, or standing up for a friend, our decisions and actions shape future generations’ worlds and worldmaking.

Possible questions that you might explore are provided below. You are not expected to respond to all (or any) of these questions. Rather, they may inspire you and your

writing. Additionally, your response can be in whatever style or genre of writing you prefer—expository, persuasive, narrative, descriptive, or creative.

We invite you to consider what it means to be and become a "good ancestor":

- What does it mean to engage with others—strangers, friends, family, people you will never meet—like a relative? How does the belief of kinship to others and/or the natural world shape your commitments to think and do?
- What wisdom from your ancestors have you learned about building equitable and just communities?
- How are you working with your peers to build a better world?
- Who are the ancestors, real and imagined, who inform your ideas of being a good ancestor?
- AI systems learn from books, art, music, conversations, scientific discoveries, and other knowledge created by countless people across generations. What responsibilities come with building or using tools that depend on the creativity, labor, and wisdom of others? How can we use AI in ways that honor the people whose knowledge came before us while creating a better future for those who come after us?
- What traditions, cultural practices, or values have been planted in you by your family, community, and relations? Which of these do you hope to carry forward, and what new seeds will you plant for those who come after you?

To support you in thinking more about the prompt, we recommend exploring the following resources:

- *Ahimsa*, Supriya Kelkar (historical fiction)
- *An Indigenous Peoples' History of the United States for Young People*, Debbie Reese (nonfiction)
- *A Time to Dance*, Padma Venkatraman
- *Balcony on the Moon: Coming of Age in Palestine*, Ibtisam Barakat
- "Being a Good Ancestor," Melanie Lenart, [Native Science Report](#) (blog article)
- *Braiding Sweetgrass for Young Adults*, Robin Wall Kimmerer (nonfiction)
- *Bud Finds Her Gift*, Robin Wall Kimmerer and Naoko Stoop (children's)
- *Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farm's Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*, Leah Penniman (nonfiction book)
- *Ida in the Middle*, Nora Lester Murad (fiction)
- *Listen, Slowly*, Thanhha Lai (fiction)
- *March*, John Lewis (autobiographical graphic novel series)
- *Star Child: A Biographical Constellation of Octavia Estelle Butler*, Ibi Zoboi (biography)
- *There Are Trans People Here*, H. Melt (poetry)

- *We Are the Ship: The Story of Negro League Baseball*, Kadir Nelson (nonfiction, graphic)
- *We Who Believe in Freedom: The Life and Times of Ella Baker*, Lea E. Williams (biography)
- *Where the Streets Had a Name*, Randa Abdel-Fattah (historical fiction)
- [“Ancestors: A Mapping of Indigenous Poetry and Poets,”](#) Joy Harjo (lecture)
- [“Ancestors,”](#) Ada Limón (poem)
- [“Remember,”](#) Joy Harjo (poem)
- [“Everyday Use,”](#) Alice Walker (short story)
- *The Best We Could Do*, Thi Bui (graphic memoir)
- [“The Pandemic is a Portal”](#), Arundhati Roy (poetry)
- *The Jumbies*, Tracey Baptiste (fiction)
- *The Boy Who Harnessed the Wind* (drama film)