

*A Sand County Almanac* by Aldo Leopold

Published posthumously, in 1948, *A Sand County Almanac* is a seminal book about conservation and land stewardship. The Longwood Library and Archives staff invites you to use the following suggestions as you meet to discuss the various themes of the book.

Discussion Topics

Land

1. Aldo Leopold described the Land Ethic as understanding the relationship between the land and us; that conservation is harmony between people and land, beauty and utility. He suggests that "Individual thinkers have asserted that the despoliation of land is not only inexpedient, but wrong, and that society has not yet affirmed this belief, and the present conservation movement is the embryo of such affirmation." ("The Land Ethic," p. 203).

Is this true today? Why do Leopold's ideas still have significance for us?

2. *A Sand County Almanac* begins with Leopold's numerous descriptions of natural beauty, which strike a chord with most readers. How can this collective appreciation and awe of beauty be a 'gateway' for widespread implementation of meaningful conservation practices?

Legacy

1. Leopold was a keen observer and diligent chronicler of nature. The first part of *Sand County* describes the monthly changes in the Wisconsin countryside. He kept meticulous notes, and using those notes, a UW-Madison Ecology professor, along with a UW-Madison Nelson Institute graduate student and acoustic ecologist have recreated a 'soundscape' of the dawn chorus Leopold would have heard. (Listen here: <http://tinyurl.com/lvzgce4>)



Why are field notes important? Do you think it is easier or more difficult to make a detailed record of nature today? How does technology assist or hamper that effort?

2. Leopold's legacy endures because he is asking the fundamental questions of our relationship to the earth, to other forms of life, to the community in which we live. We are rediscovering his significance for community-based conservation and restoration.

Who are the 'modern Leopolds' of today? Who are they in your own community, and what are they doing to conserve the land? Are they doing enough?

### Community

1. Leopold talks about a shift of values being achieved by reappraising things unnatural, tame, and confined in terms of things natural, wild, and free.

How can communities work together to achieve that attitude? How have communities worked together locally to achieve this reappraisal?

2. Our country is far more developed than Leopold's 1940s America - does this make his concept of connecting land and people more or less challenging? Do you believe we can 'change the role of *Homo sapiens* from conqueror of the land-community to plain member and citizen of it'? ("The Land Ethic" p. 204)
3. "A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community? It is wrong when it tends otherwise." ("The Land Ethic," pp.224-225).

Do you agree with this passage? Do you think Leopold was suggesting that the health of the ecological community should take precedence over its individual members? What could the implications of this concept be, for people?

\*Page numbers refer to *A Sand County Almanac and Sketches Here And There* by Aldo Leopold illustrated by Charles W. Schwartz. Oxford University Press © 1949



LONGWOOD  
GARDENS

Community Read  
Read. Think. Engage.