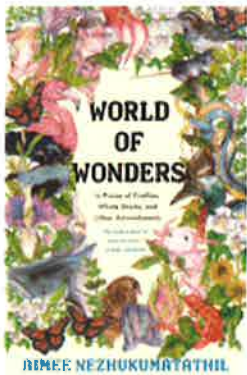


Proposed Core Literature Titles

The following summary is provided by the California Department of Education's "Recommended Literature List", and the top three Google searches of the book title and author name (e.g. World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks and Other Astonishments by Aimee Nezhukumatathil) that produced a description of the title.

World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks and Other Astonishments

Proposed Grade Level: 11



Title: **World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks and Other Astonishments**

Author: **Nezhukumatathil, Aimee**

First Published: **2020**

Proposed Grade Level: 11

Lexile Measurement:

California Department of Education, Recommended Literature List:

Descriptions From Top 3 Google Searches:

<https://www.goodreads.com/en/book/show/48615751>

From beloved, award-winning poet Aimee Nezhukumatathil comes a debut work of nonfiction--a collection of essays about the natural world, and the way its inhabitants can teach, support, and inspire us.

As a child, Nezhukumatathil called many places home: the grounds of a Kansas mental institution, where her Filipina mother was a doctor; the open skies and tall mountains of Arizona, where she hiked with her Indian father; and the chillier climes of western New York and Ohio. But no matter where she was transplanted--no matter how awkward the fit or forbidding the landscape--she was able to turn to our world's fierce and funny creatures for guidance.

"What the peacock can do," she tells us, "is remind you of a home you will run away from and run back to all your life." The axolotl teaches us to smile, even in the face of unkindness; the touch-me-not plant shows us how to shake off unwanted advances; the narwhal demonstrates how to survive in hostile environments. Even in the strange and the unlovely, Nezhukumatathil finds beauty and kinship. For it is this way with wonder: it requires that we are curious enough to look past the distractions in order to fully appreciate the world's gifts.

Warm, lyrical, and gorgeously illustrated by Fumi Nakamura, World of Wonders is a book of sustenance and joy.

<https://coloradoreview.colostate.edu/reviews/world-of-wonders/>

Aimee Nezhukumatathil's first essay collection, World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments, stands with one foot in nature writing and the other in memoir. Widely known for her poetry, Nezhukumatathil uses clean, playful prose to guide us through interesting anecdotes about nature and morsels of memoir about growing up as a woman of color in America.

Structured into a series of bite-sized essays, Nezhukumatathil offers vignettes on a selection of flora, fauna, and natural phenomena while drawing on her own life experiences. Some mostly memoir, some mostly nature anecdotes, there is enough of each to fascinate and draw us all in. Even for non-nature enthusiasts, the nature anecdotes are interesting and digestible. Who knew the adorable axolotl has cannibalistic tendencies or that red-spotted newts are filled with deadly toxins? Interesting as each anecdote is, they also embody the theme of each essay.

In "Firefly," Nezhukumatathil paints a mesmerizing picture of these insects as innocent and nostalgic as a childhood summer: "In flight, [a firefly] is like a loud laugh, the kind that only appears in summer, with the stink of meats sizzling somewhere down the street, and the mouths of neighborhood children stained with popsicle juice and hinging open with the excitement of a ball game or tag."

And while we learn about the synchronous fireflies in the Great Smoky Mountains National Park, what we see even more clearly is her parents trying to instill a sense of wonder in their daughters. "Perhaps," she writes, "I can keep those summer nights with my family inside an empty jam jar, with holes poked in the lid, a twig and a few strands of grass tucked inside."

Though the essays center around wonders of nature, many of the memoirs in these essays are laced with stories of stereotypes and racism. In "Peacock," we follow Nezhukumatathil through a school day in Phoenix, one of the many places where she lived in during her very mobile childhood. In the essay, her teacher reprimands her for drawing a picture of a peacock, a bird native to India and South Asia, and indicates that she should "start over and draw American animals" since they "live in Ah-mer-i-kah!" Nezhukumatathil deftly shows us how racism is never confined to a single incident, and how a single incident can create ripples through an entire life.

Nezhukumatathil's parents, immigrants from southern India and the Philippines, play a prominent role in many of the essays as they grow their medical practices and their children. Sometimes, as in "Firefly" and "Catalpa Tree," they are characters, and we're given glimpses into their lives: familial conversation during a long car ride to the Smokies, greetings in her mother's office after a day of work and school. Other times, as in "Whale Shark" and "Monsoon" we don't see them directly, but we see their influence in different ways: the Pilipino folktale of Kablay, a visit to her ancestral homeland with extended family.

Through the entire collection, we feel the wonder that nature and family have created in Nezhukumatathil's life and are able to reflect on the wonder that we experience in our own lives.

<https://www.nytimes.com/2020/09/11/books/review/aimee-nezhukumatathil-world-of-wonders.html>

This charmingly illustrated collection of nature essays is more than it might appear to be at first glance. At its simplest, it is about 20 different natural phenomena ranging from peacocks to narwhals, corpse flowers to flamingos, dragon fruit to fireflies. The illustrations and title bring to mind those books many of us had as children that sought to capture the whole of creation ambitiously between two covers.

My first impression was a slightly jaded sigh. I thought this was going to be another earnest tome of nature writing. This genre is starting to resemble its subject matter: It is everywhere, often quite boring and repetitive, and not as good as it used to be. But within a few lines of the first essay in this book it is clear that Aimee Nezhukumatathil is giving us more than that, much more.

This book is like the moment when you go to a familiar outside place and suddenly you see some amazing thing you had never expected, like the time recently in one of our fields I saw a peregrine falcon take down a pigeon with a bullet like thud out of the gray sky, and then, earthed, mantle it beneath its wings, then rip it to bloody red shreds, surrounded by wisps of fluffy down. Suddenly the sky and the field felt different and every one of my senses was in hyperdrive. "World of Wonders" has just that effect: Within two pages, nature writing feels different and fresh and new. Nezhukumatathil has written a timely story about love, identity and belonging (more accurately often about not belonging, because of racism and her family's immigrant experience).