

WITNESS TO CHANGE

COMMUNITY CONVERSATIONS ON COASTAL IMPACTS

OVERVIEW, SUMMARIES & AUTHOR BIOS



Witness to Change: Community Conversations on Coastal Impacts is an adult reading and discussion program incorporating history, memoir, and fiction. Sessions are intended to spark dialogue around issues and themes supported by the texts, including but not limited to

- experiences of flooding
- hurricanes
- land loss and dislocation
- scarcity and adaptation
- risk and relocation

Participants will engage in discussions led by scholar facilitators who encourage critical thinking about the subjects discussed.

READING SELECTIONS, SUMMARIES, AND AUTHOR BIOS

Elizabeth Rush, *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore*. Milkweed Editions, 2018.

With every passing day, and every record-breaking hurricane, it grows clearer that climate change is neither imagined nor distant—and that rising seas are transforming the coastline of the United States in irrevocable ways. In *Rising*, Elizabeth Rush guides readers through some of the places where this change has been most dramatic, from the Gulf Coast to Miami, and from New York City to the Bay Area. For many of the plants, animals, and humans in these places, the options are stark: retreat or perish in place.

Witness to Change: Conversations on Coastal Impacts is a program of the Louisiana Endowment for the Humanities and is part of the BHP-funded project, Coastal Impacts: An Integrated Approach for Community Adaptation, Understanding, and Planning, which will assist local communities to build intergenerational coastal literacy through community conversations around books, film, and exhibitions, fostering greater understanding of and support for coastal restoration projects.

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Weaving firsthand testimonials from those facing this choice—a Staten Islander who lost her father during Sandy, the remaining holdouts of a Native American community on a drowning Isle de Jean Charles, a neighborhood in Pensacola settled by escaped slaves hundreds of years ago—with profiles of wildlife biologists, activists, and other members of these vulnerable communities, *Rising* privileges the voices of those too often kept at the margins.

Elizabeth Rush is a visiting lecturer in English at Brown University and the 2019 National Science Foundation’s Antarctic Artist and Writer. Her book, *Rising: Dispatches from the New American Shore*, won the National Outdoor Book Award and was a finalist for the Pulitzer Prize in 2018.

Paolo Bacigalupi, *The Water Knife*. Penguin Random House, 2015.

Water is scarce in the American Southwest. With natural resources dwindling, Arizona, Nevada, and California are locked in a fierce battle for what little relief the shriveling Colorado River can provide. Catherine Case, the Queen of the Colorado—murderous and hard as steel—seems to be coming out on top with enough control to manage luxury arcology developments in Las Vegas while the rest of civilization descends into a scene of anarchic violence and poverty. When word gets out that there may be an untapped water source with rights up for grabs, she sends one of her best employees—the water knife, Angel Velasquez—to Phoenix to find out more.

In this fast-paced sci-fi thriller set in the not-too-distant future, Bacigalupi offers a supercharged and haunting tour de force that speaks to our most pressing contemporary issues, pushing us to consider how we engage with—and how we can and should protect—the world we inhabit and the resources that ensure our survival.

Paolo Bacigalupi is the best-selling author of *The Windup Girl*, *Ship Breaker* (a National Book Award finalist), *The Drowned Cities*, and *The Water Knife*.

Jesmyn Ward, *Salvage the Bones*. Bloomsbury, 2011.

A hurricane is building over the Gulf of Mexico, threatening the coastal town of Bois Sauvage, Mississippi, and Esch’s father is growing concerned. A hard drinker, largely absent, he doesn’t show concern for much else. Esch and her three brothers are stocking food, but there isn’t much to save. Lately, Esch can’t keep down what

OVERVIEW, SUMMARIES & AUTHOR BIOS

food she gets; she's fourteen and pregnant. Her brother Skeetah is sneaking scraps for his prized pitbull's new litter, dying one by one in the dirt. Meanwhile, brothers Randall and Junior try to stake their claim in a family long on child's play and short on parenting.

As the twelve days that make up the novel's framework yield to their dramatic conclusion, this unforgettable family—motherless children sacrificing for one another as they can, protecting and nurturing where love is scarce—pulls itself up to face another day. A big-hearted novel about familial love and community against all odds, and a wrenching look at the lonesome, brutal, and restrictive realities of rural poverty, *Salvage the Bones* is muscled with poetry, revelatory, and real.

Jesmyn Ward is an associate professor of English at Tulane University. A two-time National Book Award winner for *Salvage the Bones* and *Sing Unburied Sing*, Ward received a McArthur Fellowship in 2017.

Mike Tidwell, *Bayou Farewell: The Rich Life and Tragic Death of Louisiana's Cajun Coast*. Vintage Books, 2010.

The Cajun coast of Louisiana is home to a way of life as unique, complex, and beautiful as the terrain itself. As travel writer Mike Tidwell journeys through the bayou, he introduces us to the food and the language, the shrimp fisherman, the Houma Indians, and the rich cultural history that makes it unlike any other place in the world. But seeing the skeletons of oak trees killed by the salinity of the groundwater, and whole cemeteries sinking into swampland and out of sight, Tidwell also explains why each introduction may be a farewell—as the storied Louisiana coast steadily erodes into the Gulf of Mexico.

Part travelogue, part environmental exposé, *Bayou Farewell* is the richly evocative chronicle of the author's travels through a world that is vanishing before our eyes.

Mike Tidwell is a journalist and travel writer, who has received the Society of American Travel Writers' Lowell Thomas Award for travel journalism four times. In 2003 he received the Audubon Naturalist Society's Conservation Award

**All summaries excerpted from publishers' websites.*