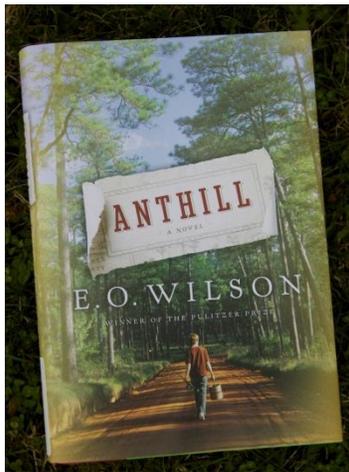


Discussion Guide

for

Anthill: A Novel By E.O. Wilson



Created for *America's Wild Read* in support of the visioning process for the US Fish and Wildlife Service's National Wildlife Refuge System in its new 10-year vision, [Conserving the Future: Wildlife Refuges and the Next Generation](#).

Visit the *Wild Read* at <http://americaswildlife.org/wildread> and then add your comments to the discussion from May 15 – July 9, 2011 at <http://wildread.blogspot.com/>

The National Conservation Training Center is the home of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and a leader in environmental sustainability. The center provides quality training tailored to support Service employees and conservation partners in the accomplishment of the agency's mission. For more information visit <http://nctc.fws.gov>.

The mission of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is working with others to conserve, protect and enhance fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats for the continuing benefit of the American people. For more information on our work and the people who make it happen, visit <http://www.fws.gov>.

It is not enough to be busy, so are the ants. The question is: what are we busy about? - Henry David Thoreau

Discussion Ideas

Anthill: A Novel

The following is a list of potential discussion questions about Anthill. Please feel free to use these in your groups, but we hope you will also contribute to the online conversation at www.wildread.blogspot.com.

Raff's Youth Experiences

What were some of Raff's key childhood experiences that lead to his interest in becoming an ecologist and environmental attorney? Why did he choose his final career?

How was Raff's experience at Lake Nokobee important in developing his passion for the environment? What were some of the personal relationships that deeply affected him (human and non-human)?

Raff was a "citizen of Lake Nokobee wildlands". What is the concept of citizenship in this case and how does it compare to Aldo Leopold's idea of citizenship and the cultivation of a land ethic?

Like Leopold's epiphany in "[Thinking Like a Mountain](#)" in the Gila National Forest, Raff too had a few profound experiences at Lake Nokobee that influenced his passion for the natural world. What were those experiences and what did they reveal to Raff about the nature of the Nokobee itself and the larger relationship of human beings to nature?

Ecological and Evolutionary Biology

What are the key animal species that are found in longleaf pine forests? What would happen if the gopher tortoise disappeared? We're often told that fire is bad for forests, but how does fire affect the health of the longleaf pine forest?

How is an ant colony a *superorganism*?

How does the presence of a queen ant determine the health and vitality of the entire colony? What colony changes ensue with the decline and death of the queen?

How do ants communicate with one another? How is an ant colony's tribal identity established?

A male ant has been termed a "guided missile loaded with sperm." What is the life cycle of a male mound building ant?

What are the varied roles of worker ants? How are soldier ants physically adapted for their role in the colony?

How do ants orient themselves as they move around their land surface environment? How are human beings influenced by pheromones?

Mound ants perform elaborate tournaments at the borders between two colonies. What is the purpose of these displays of ant power?

The development of an ant *supercolony* appears to depend on a genetic mutation. What is the genetic process that allows a supercolony to form? How is the formation of a supercolony maladaptive?

Discuss the biological themes of competition for space, for resources, and power that are repeated in the novel. Discuss the parallels between an ant colony and human society.

In the Prologue, what do you think is meant by “war is a genetic imperative” ?

Conserving Wild Places

Raff’s Uncle Cyrus believes in the power of “working within the system” using money and influence to effect the change you desire. What is the author’s view of the best way to effect wildlife conservation?

Did the author appear to be conflicted about the role of ecotourism in conserving the environment? What are the tradeoffs in partially converting natural areas to housing developments in order to conserve some of the area’s natural value? Is compromise always possible or necessary? Describe why or why not (provide an example).

What role do environmental organizations like Gaia Force play in America’s conservation movement?

How do a person’s worldview, spirituality and politics influence their interests in conserving nature?

Describe a special place you connect with, similar to the way Raff connects with Nokobee.

Is it true as Raff said quoting his FSU professor, that in the USA, “Green, is the new Red, White and Blue”? For example, Nokobee Westside is a “green” housing development. Will the business of “Greening America” save the environment?

General

What specific themes did the author emphasize throughout the novel? What do you think E.O. Wilson is trying to get across to the reader?

Do the characters seem real and believable? Can you relate to their predicaments? To what extent do they remind you of yourself or someone you know?

How do characters change or evolve throughout the course of the story? What events trigger such changes?

In what ways do the events in the books reveal evidence of the author's world view?

Did certain parts of the book make you uncomfortable? If so, why did you feel that way? Did this lead to a new understanding or awareness of some aspect of your life you might not have thought about before?

Do you think the author is trying to elicit a certain response from the reader? How has this book changed or enhanced your view of the author?

Discuss the book's structure and the author's use of language and writing style. How does the author draw the reader in and keep the reader engaged? Does the author convey his story with comedy, self-pity, or something else?

Were there any instances in which you felt the author was not being truthful? How did you react to these sections?

What is the author's most admirable quality? Is this someone you would want to know or have known?

Book Discussion Hints

Write down important page numbers - If there are parts of the book that made an impact on you or that you think may come up in discussion, write down the page numbers so that you can access the passages easily while preparing and leading your book club discussion.

Want to come up with your own questions? Check out the tips for writing book club discussion questions below.

Let others answer first - When you are asking questions, you want to facilitate discussion, not come off as a teacher. By letting others in the book club answer first, you will promote conversation and help everyone feel like their opinions matter.

Make connections between comments - If someone gives a comment to an earlier question that connects well with a later question, highlight what you see. By connecting people's comments to the questions, you'll help build momentum in the conversation.

Rein in tangents - Book clubs are popular not only because people like to read, but also because they are great social outlets. A little off topic conversation is fine, but you also want to respect the fact that people have read the book and expect to talk about it.

Don't feel obligated to get through all the questions - The best questions sometimes lead to intense conversations. That's a good thing! The questions are there as a guide. While you will want to get through at least three or four questions, it will probably be rare that you finish all ten. Respect people's time by wrapping up the discussion when the meeting time is over rather than pushing on until you finish everything you planned.

Student Activities

1. Find out about your closest national wildlife refuge and plan a visit.
2. What are the key species and habitats at that refuge?
3. Adopt a local woodland/marsh for exploration. Create a square meter plot and observe it for a week. What plants do you see? What kinds of insects are you observing?
4. Create a food web poster for the long leaf pine ecosystem
5. Share facebook or twitter feeds from conservation organizations
6. Water conservation: is there a lakefront or beach nearby where students could pick up trash during a “clean up day”? Stream restoration/shoreline restoration activities available through local organizations (e.g. Audubon, soil and water conservation districts).
7. Investigate a new development to see what conflicts there may be with nature. What are the compromises you see? Identify the players. Who is winning? Who is losing? Describe the role of politics and the media.
8. Create an anthill rap song and send us your video (library@fws.gov)
9. Make a Frogman t-shirt.
10. Create a website for an ecotourism business focusing on your favorite natural place.
11. Write a short story from the perspective of an insect (or another wild thing).
12. Screen the movie *Ants* and compare it to *Anthill*.
13. Find out more about EO Wilson. What are his other books about?

Related links of interest:

Smithsonian Ant Lab <http://entomology.si.edu/siantlab.html>

FWS Longleaf Pine Initiative <http://www.fws.gov/southeast/SHC/pdf/LongleafPineLCC.pdf>

Gopher tortoise facts <http://www.gophertortoise.org/tortoise/facts.htm>

http://www.defenders.org/wildlife_and_habitat/wildlife/gopher_tortoise.php

Harvard Law school application <http://www.law.harvard.edu/prospective/jd/apply/index.html>

Giving the Land a Voice – multimedia contest <http://americaswildlife.org/youth-contest/>

Link to NWR Home Page <http://www.fws.gov/refuges/>

FWS Social Media Home page <http://www.fws.gov/home/socialmedia/>

America's Wild Read Discussion Blog Schedule

Week	Date	Discussion Topic	Moderator
Week 1	April 25 – 30	Introduce Yourself – Ask Questions, Leave a Comment	WILD READ Team
Week 2	May 1-7	Curt Meine's " The Once and Future Land Ethic " Aldo Leopold's " Thinking Like a Mountain "	Curt Meine (Center for Humans and Nature; Aldo Leopold Foundation and Int. Crane Foundation)
Week 3	May 8-14	Curt Meine's " The Once and Future Land Ethic " Aldo Leopold's " Thinking Like a Mountain "	Will Stolzenberg - Author (Where the Wild Things Were)
Week 4	May 15-21	Anthill: Part I: "Frogman" (Chapter 1)	Anne Post - Chief Librarian (NCTC Conservation Library)
Week 5	May 22-28	Anthill: Part II: "The Citizen of Nokobee" (Chapters 2-14)	Bill Finch – Executive Director (Mobile Botanical Gardens)
Week 6	May 29- June4	Anthill: Part III: "The Launch" (Chapters 15-18)	Michael Gale (FWS) Danielle Brigida (National Wildlife Federation)
Week 7	June 5-11	Anthill: Part IV: "The Anthill Chronicles" (Chapters 19-27)	Dr. Drew Bell (Entomologist)
Week 8	June 12-18	Anthill: Part V: "The Armentarium" (Chapters 28-32)	Mark Madison – Public Historian (FWS History); Kris Hoellen (Conservation Fund)
Week 9	June 19-25	Anthill: Part VI: "The Nokobee Wars" (Chapter 33-38)	Laura Bies – Environmental Attorney (The Wildlife Society)
Week 10	June 26-July 2	In the Field with E.O. Wilson	Ben Raines (Environmental journalist) TENTATIVE
Week 11	July 3-9	Essay and E.O. Wilson's Anthill Wrap Up	Margaret Atwood (Author)