

A World of Wonders at IU East: Indiana Humanities One State/One Story Program

BETH SOUTH

Assistant Librarian of Access and Technical Services
IU East

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In 2022, the IU East Campus Library was awarded a Community Read grant from Indiana Humanities to participate in a statewide read of Aimee Nezhukumatathil's *World of Wonders: In Praise of Fireflies, Whale Sharks, and Other Astonishments* as part of the [One State/One Story program](#). This is an initiative designed by Indiana Humanities, in partnership with the Indiana State Library and Indiana Center for the Book, to encourage Hoosiers to read and engage with a book as part of a statewide conversation, and to examine our relationship with the natural world.



Nezhukumatathil's [*World of Wonders*](#) is a beautiful collection of essays, some somber, some humorous, that reflects on our relationship with the natural world and how we can find inspiration and appreciation in our environment. In each chapter, Nezhukumatathil focuses on a particular animal or plant, whose properties and habits remind her of various aspects of her life. She reflects on her experiences growing up, as a mother, a writer, and as a woman of color and discusses how these amazing lifeforms influence how she views the world.

As an active member of the IU East Sustainability Council, Assistant Librarian of Access and Technical Services Beth South decided to apply for the small grant as a way for the campus library to actively provide sustainability focused library programming that also intersects with diversity and inclusion. Recipients of the One State/One Story grant are required to host a book discussion as well as two or more supporting programs to explore the themes woven throughout *World of Wonder*. The IU East Campus Library received 30 free copies of the book and \$750 for programming and marketing support.

Program 1: Nature-Inspired Scavenger Hunt

As *World of Wonders* is available campus wide as an [ebook in IUCat](#), and IU East has a large online student population, the campus library began promoting the book with a month-long, virtual scavenger hunt to kick off the beginning of Earth Month (April). Inspired by all the amazing creatures and plant life featured in this book, and the beautiful illustrations by Fumi Mini Nakamura, the campus library used Google Quizzes to create an [online scavenger hunt](#) that encouraged participants to get out and enjoy nature throughout April. The scavenger hunt had a mix of online searching, book sleuthing, and a variety of outdoor and sustainability-related activities. All the questions or activities related in some way to the chapters in the book, which are titled after the life form being discussed (i.e., Dragon Fruit, Narwhal, Fireflies, Corpse Flower, etc.). All online participants won a physical copy of *World of Wonders* and a small IU East swag bag, consisting of a bookmark, pencil, stickers, and pins with images from the book. All student participants were entered into a drawing for a \$50 book scholarship from the Campus Library. The winner of the scholarship was Micah Turney, a sophomore majoring in General Studies.

Program 2: "Gas and Oil, Dirt and Ghosts: Landscape and Histories of Extraction in Indiana."

On April 20, 2022, guest lecturer Ava Tomasula y Garcia gave her presentation titled "Gas and Oil, Dirt and Ghosts: Landscape and Histories of Extraction in Indiana." This hour-long presentation connected to *World of Wonders* themes of immigration and natural landscapes and was listed as a key event during the Office of Sustainability's Earth Week celebration at IU East. It was a fascinating talk on the history of the gas and oil boom in Indiana and how this relatively short period of time, mid-1800s to early 20th century, drastically changed the social, political, and physical landscape of Indiana. The talk was held via [Facebook Live](#) to reach the widest possible audience as many of our students and faculty continue to work and attend IU East online. We had a lot of great questions from our attendees, one being, "How

do you think those of us who live in Indiana today could be changed by being aware of this history? What actions would you like to see citizens of Indiana take?"

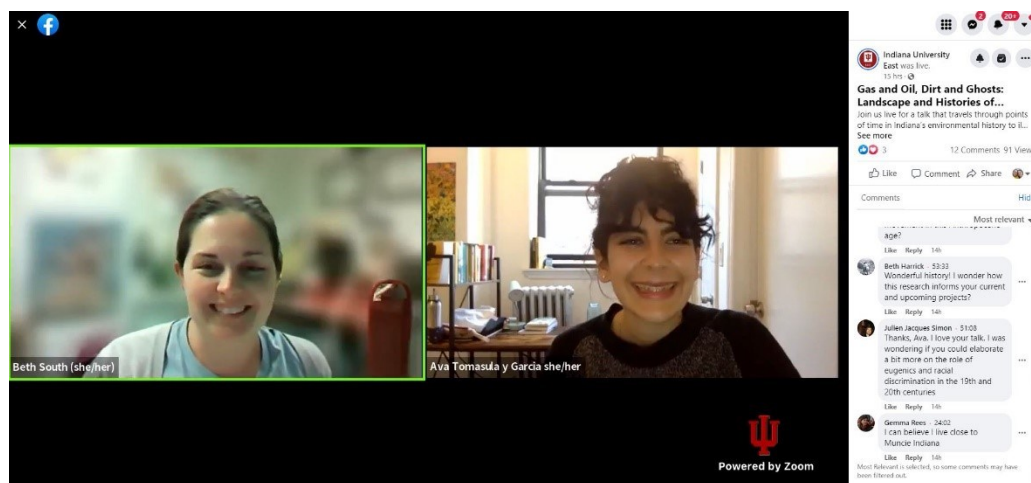


Figure 1 Beth and Ava during the Q&A

Programs 3 & 4: Birds of Wonder

Throughout the month of June, the IU East Campus Library hosted afternoon programming for Richmond's [Reading Academy](#), a full day of classes focused on reading and writing over a four-week period. An initiative of [Every Child Can Read, Inc.](#), the Reading Academy is a program that works to ensure that every child can read at reading level by the third grade. To provide creative academic enrichment, the campus library team, with IU East student, staff, and faculty volunteers, planned and implemented a variety of programming activities, such as weaving, riddle creation, nature journaling, science experiments, and yoga. Assistant Librarian of Access and Technical Services Beth South volunteered to lead two programs, both inspired by the *World of Wonders* community read.

Birds of the World Art Activity

A unique attribute to Nezhukumatathil's *World of Wonders* is the inclusion of beautiful illustrations by Fumi Mini Nakamura. The goal of the "Birds of the World" session was for students to learn about different birds from around the world and then draw and color a version of one that interested them.

The June 22 program for The Reading Academy had 19 third graders actively discussing the characteristics that birds share, where they are found, and how they are important to us and our environment. Using a multimedia presentation she created, Beth talked about the birds featured in *World of Wonders*, like the potoo and the southern cassowary, and a few other birds of interest, such as the laughing kookaburra and ivory-billed woodpecker. Students looked at the artwork of Fumi Mini Nakamura and other artistic renditions of birds from

books, then they were able to choose a bird that interested them and create their own version of it with crayons and markers on cardstock.



Figure 2 Beth talking about the Superb Bird-of-Paradise

Bird Count Hike

The second bird-focused session was a bird hike on June 27. Based on Nezhukumatathil's chapter titled "Questions while searching for birds with my half-white sons, aged six and nine, National Audubon Bird Count Day, Oxford, MS," Beth read the book *Counting Birds: The Idea That Helped Save Our Feather Friends* by Heidi E.Y. Stempe, and discussed the importance of counting birds, how a bird census can help us understand what's happening in our environment, and ways the students can be citizen scientists. Beth then led seven second graders and three adults out on a hike along the cross-country trails behind Hayes Hall. Students were given binoculars and a notebook to document the number of birds they see, what they hear, and other information that interests them. Throughout the hike, Beth stopped to share tips on bird watching and talked about the different birds that students may see or hear



Figure 3 Beth with second graders on bird count hike

during their walk. Both the birds of the world art activity and the bird hike were well received by the students and their teachers

Program 5: Book Discussion with First Year Seminar Students

In fall of 2022, there were two classes that incorporated *World of Wonders* into their curriculum, ENG-W 206 Creative Writing with Associate Professor of English Tanya Perkins and Assistant Librarian of Instruction KT Lowe's First Year Seminar (FYS), totaling 33 students. Ultimately, KT Lowe's FYS was the only class that ended up having time to participate in a full class discussion. The students were paired up into teams and each team had to create discussion questions for one of the assigned chapters. On November 3, KT led the class discussion, assisted by Beth South, where 17 students discussed questions pertaining to the format and audience of the book and covering chapters "Peacock," "Narwhal," "Potoo," and "Axolotl." The students were deeply engaged with the text, especially the chapter titled "Peacock," talking in-depth about what it means to be an "American" and personal identity. There was also a long conversation about using animal attributes to either empower oneself or to belittle or degrade another.



Figure 4 FYS students' discussion of *World of Wonders*

While the initial purpose of applying for the One State/One Story Community Read grant was to create sustainability-related programming for IU East students, this grant allowed us the flexibility and the resources to strengthen our quality programming to local elementary students too. We were able to partner with the Office of Sustainability and the Office of

Diversity for the guest lecturer event and the scavenger hunt. We also connected with our local public library, Morrisson-Reeves Library, who also received the One State/One Story Grant, and we were able to cross-promote some of our events. This was a small grant, but an impactful one as the campus library was able to deepen its connection and support to our campus and community partners and educate on the topics of diversity, the humanities, and the environment to our students and community.

Indiana Humanities provides a lot of grant and program opportunities related to connecting the humanities to everyday life, a good resource for any librarian or library worker looking for ideas or project funding. For questions on applying to the One State/One Story program, working with Indiana Humanities, or about the programs featured here, please contact Assistant Librarian of Access and Technical Services Beth South at eabrockm@iue.edu.