



## Introduction

Thank you for participating in JVC Northwest's Ruined Readers Book Club. Launched as part of our 60<sup>th</sup> Anniversary celebrations in January 2016, Ruined Readers has brought together decades of former Jesuit Volunteers (FJVs), current Jesuit Volunteers (JVs), JV EnCorps members (JVEs), family, and friends around the values of Community, Simple Living, Social and Ecological Justice, and Spirituality. Using books nominated by our community, our Book Club Volunteer, staff, and Book Club participants select each book off of a compiled list. Our current JVE volunteer writes a reflection guide those engaging in our Book Club as groups or as guided self-reflections. Our hope is these conversations will bring together communities across the country and the world in a meaningful way. [Visit our Goodreads profile](#) to see all nominated books.

## Commitment to Equity and Inclusion

With each year that passes, the Ruined Readers Book Club continues to evolve. In the book club's first year we selected four books, one for each of our program values. In the second year, we added a fifth book to allow for separate selections for Social Justice and Ecological Justice. In 2018-19 Book Club featured books written only by authors of color. For 2020, Ruined Readers evolved again and discerned to become recommended titles, still focusing on our core values and inclusion and equity. If you have suggestions for books to read for upcoming selections, please email [bookclub@jvcnorthwest.org](mailto:bookclub@jvcnorthwest.org).

## Reflection Questions

*The following questions include a reading guide specific to our current selection and broader discussion questions to encourage a shared dialog around the value of social justice. This guide is meant to provide ideas and suggestions as to topics you may wish to explore individually or as a group; it is not an exhaustive list. In a group setting, please feel free to encourage book club members to ask and explore their own questions. If you are doing a self-guided reading of the book selection, we encourage you to use these questions to journal or take intentional reflective time. For example, journaling about what issues of justice are currently most present in your direct community or in your direct work and how you would like to be an agent of change to address these issues.*

## Reading Guide: *Upstream* by Mary Oliver

### From the Essay "Winter Hours"

In the winter I was writing about, there was much darkness. Darkness of nature, darkness of event, darkness of spirit. The sprawling darkness of not knowing. We speak of the light of reason. We would speak here of the darkness of the world, and the light of \_\_\_\_\_. But I don't know what to call it. Maybe hope. Maybe faith. But not a shaped faith—only say a gesture, or a continuum of gestures. But probably it is closer to hope, that is, more active and far messier than faith must be. Faith, as I imagine it, is tensile, and cool, and has no need of words. Hope, I know, is a fighter and a screamer.

From our Book Club Volunteer, Sharon Johnson:

When we decided to move Ruined Readers Book Club to an online guide, and decided to focus on Simple Living as our next value, we did not anticipate these changing times. Like many people, I love Mary Oliver’s poetry, but I was new to her essays. One can read the book, *Upstream*, straight through, or dip in, or skip one topic for another. I like that we get a view of Mary’s life – her walks about the countryside outside Provincetown, writers she loved that contributed to her life of the mind. Mary Oliver grew up in Ohio and met her life partner, Molly Malone Cook, at Steepletop, the home of Edna St. Vincent Millay in upstate New York. Both Mary and Molly lived in Greenwich Village in the late 1950s, moving to Provincetown, Massachusetts, in the early 1960s. Molly photographed many famous writers and artists, who were their friends, although they lived a very simple life in Provincetown. There are a variety of articles about, and interviews with Mary Oliver to enhance one’s reading.

Our theme is Simple Living. Mary Oliver chose to live simply but it wasn’t a life of deprivation. She scavenged the woods and the sea for food, and built a small house of rescued materials from the dump. And she Paid Attention. What does Simple Living mean to you?

1. What do you make of Oliver’s use of questioning throughout her poems and writing?
2. How does Oliver help ground you to the present moment through her carefully crafted words?
3. How have you built attentiveness into your life? In what ways can you cultivate more time to be attentive? How could this impact your days?
4. Do you, like Oliver, believe that “everything has a soul?”
5. How has Oliver used writing to overcome the hardships in her life? What words or phrases can you extract from this book that give weight to her courage?
6. What did you make of Oliver’s words on creative work needing solitude? Did you agree or disagree with them?
7. If your soul was a season, what one would it be? Why is this so?
8. If you had to draw a line and separate your life into three segments this very moment, where would those lines be drawn?
9. If there was one page in this book you had to {gently} rip out and carry in your pocket forever, what would it be?
10. How has this book been life-giving for you?

—Adapted from Homesongblog.com

## General Questions for Consideration

1. What does the value of Social Justice mean to you?
2. Did this book bring a new or different understanding of Social Justice?
3. What particular justice areas do you have the most energy around?
4. Do you have a favorite passage to share and discuss?
5. How did this book affect you? Did the reality presented seem reasonable, shocking, or somewhere in between?
6. Where can you continue to work for understanding in your direct community?
7. How will you share something you learned/some perspective you gained from this book with others?
8. What other current media (movies, books, TV, plays, etc.) are playing out similar themes? What role can these media portrayals play in the evolution of our culture?
9. Discuss how you and/or your community might be working to address inequality or issues of social justice.

## Closing Notes and Moving Forward

### Wrapping Up Your Group

We encourage all Book Club participants, facilitators, and hosts to reflect on the following two questions moving forward from the last Book Club meeting. We have also included several ways you can continue to explore the value of social justice moving forward.

- What is one thing you are grateful for that has come out of your experience in this Book Club?



- What is one action or intention related to social justice that you will take away from this experience?

### Resources to Move the Conversation Forward

Here are some takeaways, in different mediums for continuing to live out the value of social justice. Hosts- please share these resources with your group- either at the meeting or over email before or after your meeting. Ask group members to contribute their own resources as well.

### Articles and Links:

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2016/11/02/mary-oliver-upstream-staying-alive-reading/>

<https://www.brainpickings.org/2015/01/20/mary-oliver-molly-malone-cook-our-world/>

<https://onbeing.org/programs/mary-oliver-listening-to-the-world-jan2019/>

<https://www.oprah.com/entertainment/aria-shriver-interviews-poet-mary-oliver/all>

<https://bookriot.com/2019/01/16/mary-oliver-poems/>

<https://www.newyorker.com/books/page-turner/mary-oliver-helped-us-stay-ama>

