

A 6 WEEK GUIDED JOURNAL

THE SILENCE OF SUBURBIA

EXPLORING INTERSECTIONAL CLIMATE CONCEPTS IN SUBURBIA



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I extend my heartfelt gratitude to Dr. Cynthia Robinson for her invaluable guidance throughout the development of this project, as well as to Dr. Maggie Christiansen for expanding my vision far beyond what I imagined my ideas could be.

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Finally, I want to thank Brooklynne Rosado for sparking my desire to find my voice. She was the first woman in my life who understood the importance of having a voice and showed me that mine could matter too.



INTRODUCTION

In an effort to recreate spontaneous sidewalk conversations that I have observed as activating to members of my own community, I have created this guided journal.

Inspired by years of collaboration and conversation with my friends and neighbors in Millard, Nebraska, my hope is that these reflective questions will guide you on your journey toward sustainable action in your own community.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Morgan Rye-Craft'. The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large 'M' and 'R'.

MORGAN RYE-CRAFT



HOW TO USE THIS JOURNAL

This journal is *yours*. The questions within it are written to help *you* reflect on *your* life. I encourage you to go into this with an open mind. Be willing to challenge even the simplest and most foundational elements of your belief systems.

It is often the behaviors and beliefs we think about the least that are most deserving of thoughtful reflection.

Why do I engage in the behaviors that I do? Why do we have certain norms in our culture in the first place? What responsibility do I have as an individual to create change in my community?

These are the types of questions we will engage with in this practice.

In a world where infinite books seem to be screaming at us that they have the answers to the incomprehensibly huge problems brought to us by climate change, I hope this one tells you something different.

The answer is you.



KEEP THESE THINGS IN MIND

There are no right or wrong answers.

This journaling practice is rooted in self-reflection - not shame.

Your emotions are always valid.

Some things may be more relevant to your life than others.

It's okay to go off book. Look up words or concepts you don't know and find other materials to complement the journey as needed.

Work at your own pace. The journal is designed to be completed over approximately 6 weeks, but that is just a guideline. Do what works for you.




TABLE OF CONTENTS

1. *WALKING WITH DISCOMFORT*
2. *SUBURBIA: A HISTORY*
3. *WHAT DOES SUSTAINABLE MEAN?*
4. *THE SUBURBAN LAWN*
5. *THE ECONOMICS OF CHANGE*
6. *BREAKING THE SILENCE*

WEEK 1

WALKING WITH DISCOMFORT



WALKING WITH DISCOMFORT

Throughout this book, you may be confronted with ideas that cause you some level of discomfort. Although it may be tempting to quickly skim past these sections to get to more comfortable territory, I encourage you to spend the most time reflecting on the sections that challenge you.

It has become somewhat ubiquitous in online spaces to see this idea expressed as “sitting with your discomfort.” Personally, I have never found that instruction to be logical. To sit implies inaction.

In this moment of rapid social change and adaptation to the post-climate change world, **inaction is unacceptable.** We must all practice our individual ability to confront challenging ideas so we can collectively maintain forward momentum in our communities.

As such, I encourage you to reflect on the idea of *walking* with your discomfort. Pick it up, and take it with you. Take time to rest as needed, of course, but remind yourself that growth does not come from within your comfort zone.

Preview: What might you need to unpack on this topic?



WEEK 2

SUBURBIA: A HISTORY



THE RISE OF SUBURBIA

If you grew up in the United States, you likely have a general understanding of how suburban living came to be the norm. In our high school history classes, we often focused on the post-World War II economic boom, the GI Bill, and the labor movement as significant factors driving suburbanization in the 1950s and 1960s.

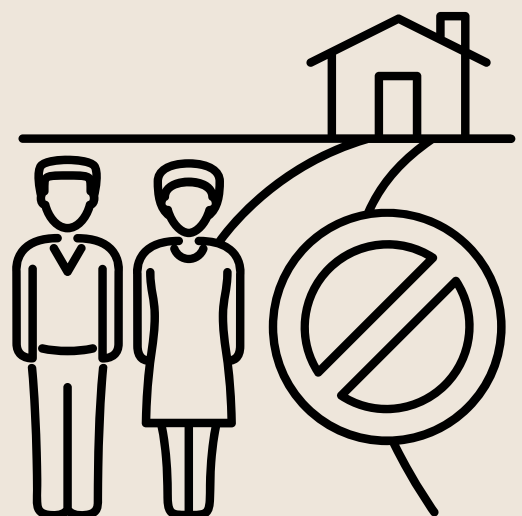
The rapid growth of a comfortable middle class (hello, Baby Boomers!) was celebrated as the peak of American Exceptionalism.

Depending on your school, you might have learned about segregation, white flight and redlining, and how these concepts intersected with the Civil Rights movement of the time.

Generally, those concepts, which cast suburbanization in a negative light, were presented as temporary consequences of the rapid changes of the era.

Historians acknowledge today that suburbanization not only excluded non-white residents from moving into areas with generational wealth building potential, but also sparked a cultural shift that laid the foundation for modern exclusionary practices.

Preview: What might you need to unpack on this topic?



WEEK 3

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY



SUSTAINABILITY DEFINED

You may recognize the word sustainable as a trendy marketing term. Alongside words like “eco-friendly” and “organic” it has somewhat ceased meaning anything on its own. It is used often to describe products.

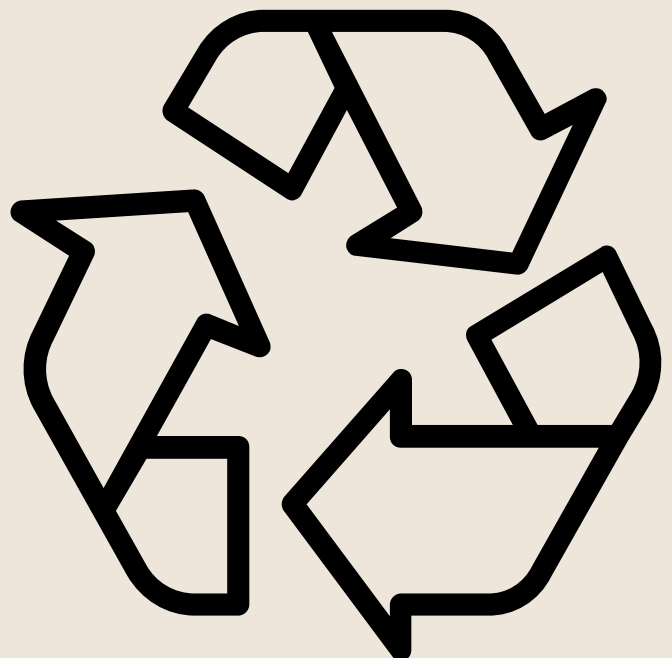
Defined simply, sustainable means the ability to be maintained at a certain rate.

For example, current rates of limited resource extraction are widely known to be unsustainable. It is simply not possible to continue extracting fossil fuels, precious metals, trees, animals or really any other non-renewable thing at the rates our global community is currently consuming them.

Sustainability extends beyond tangible objects though. It serves as a philosophical lens through which we can analyze various aspects of life.

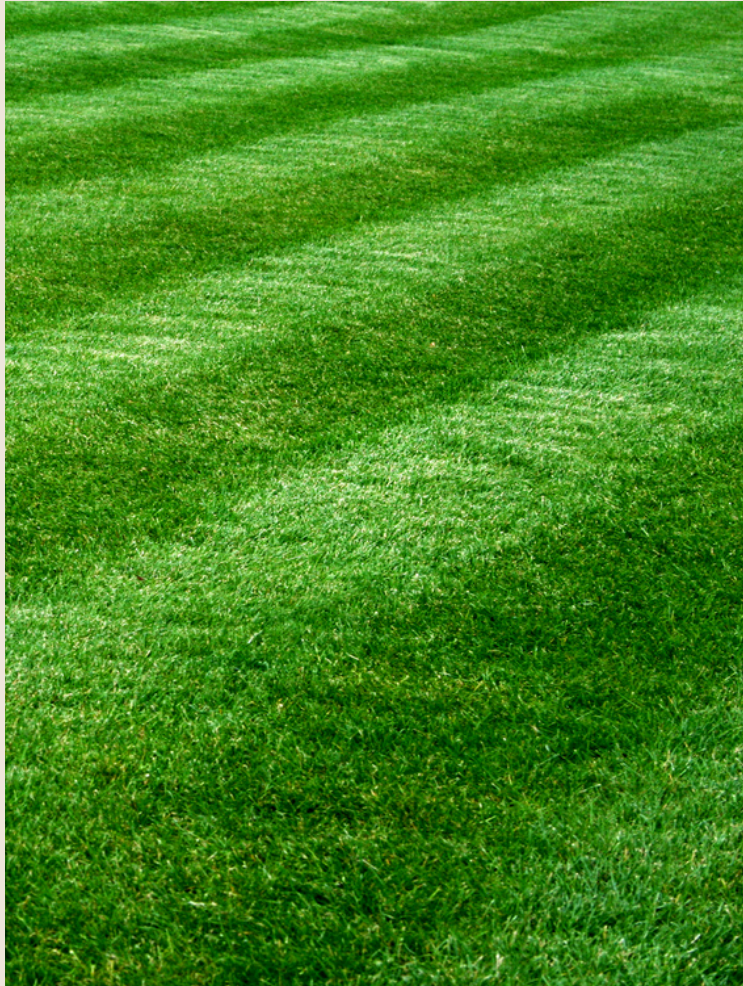
In doing so, we can sort through all manner of large-scale issues, and break them down into tangible and productive individual action items.

Preview: What do you hope to learn in this section?



WEEK 4

THE SUBURBAN LAWN



THE SUBURBAN LAWN

Have you ever really thought about why we have lawns?

We can't eat them. They're expensive to maintain. They require excessive inputs of time and physical and financial resources.

So what do they do?

Lawns have spent the past few hundred years evolving from the enormous status symbols of European lords and ladies, to what they are here and now - miniaturized versions in suburban America that still stand as a symbol of prosperity and status.

Suburban communities value neatness, and our lawns are no exception. The tidier the lawn, the less likely a suburban resident is to receive a nasty comment or a note from the HOA asking them to clean up.

In our post climate change world, it is time to rethink what lawns symbolize, what misperceptions we hold about our human interaction with "wildness" and what our ethical obligation is to change the seemingly benign norm of keeping a tidy lawn.

Preview: What might you need to unpack on this topic?



WEEK 5

THE ECONOMICS OF CHANGE



THE COST OF CHANGE

Let's be honest. We all love a bargain.

Consumerist culture has us pretty well conditioned to seek out the cheapest option. To get the most bang for our buck. To get more for less.

Through the lens of sustainability, it becomes apparent that there is a disconnect between this consumerist model and a sustainable future.

The foundations of a sustainable future will not come free to anyone.

As privileged individuals, we must reflect on our buying power and be prepared to wield our social and financial capital to pursue meaningful change.

Additionally, we must be prepared for the social cost in the pursuit of a sustainable future. Social norms are hard to change for a reason. They represent comfort and safety. When we defy foundational norms within our communities, we amplify discomfort and discordance.

In this way, we must consider our temporary discomfort as an investment into our sustainable future.

Preview: What might you need to unpack on this topic?



WEEK 6

BREAKING THE SILENCE



THE SILENCE OF SUBURBIA

You may be wondering at this point why this book is titled “The Silence of Suburbia.” We’ve spent very little time reflecting directly on speaking up about climate change, or really having direct conversations at all.

Or have we?

In any pursuit of justice - climate justice included - we must acknowledge a foundational reality: **Silence is violence.**

If we work through simple norms like lawns and consumerist trends and come to the conclusion that they may be rooted in injustice or harm, we must simultaneously acknowledge that our silent complicity in said norms is in some ways violent.

That’s hard to grapple with, particularly given our limited capacity as individuals to disengage from systems that are beyond our control.

The good news is, it is possible to speak up in the face of suburban silence through intentional, imperfect action.

Preview: What might you need to unpack on this topic?

Silence



CONCLUSION

Congratulations on the completion of this guided journal!

You may be feeling all sorts of whacky ways right now - and that's okay! Self-reflective practice can be challenging, particularly when working with such heavy topics as we have explored these past 6 weeks.

My hope is that you have gained confidence in self-reflective thought processes that can guide you in your journey toward a more intentional and sustainable lifestyle.

As you continue on your journey outside of this book, remember to check back in on it. Re-reflect on the questions and see how your answers may change. Work to apply self-reflective practice in other areas of your life.

And whenever you find yourself losing sight of the possibility for a more sustainable world, remind yourself this:

The answer is you.

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