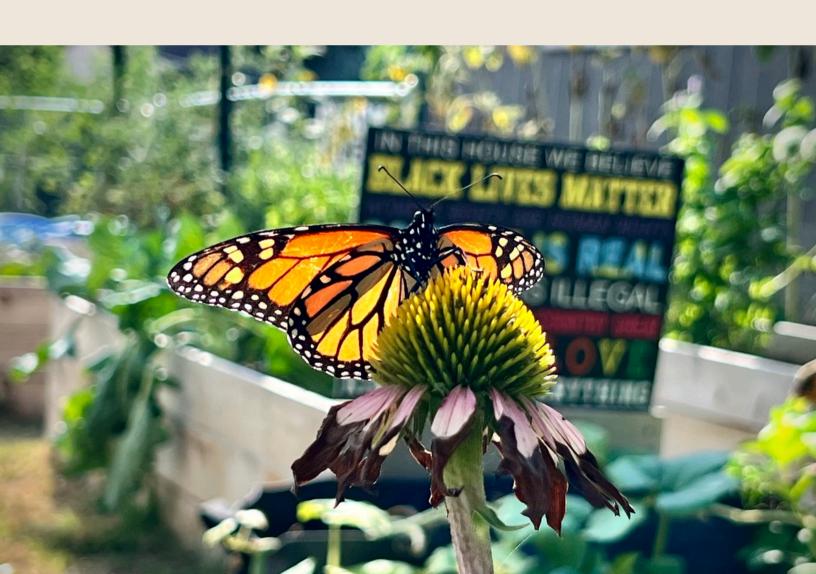
A 6 WEEK GUIDED JOURNAL

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.

I also want to thank Cindy Maxwell-Ostdiek for her tireless advocacy in our community of Millard, Nebraska. Her compassionate leadership is a constant source of inspiration for people looking to make a difference in our community.

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.

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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.



KEEP THESE THINGS IN MIND

There are no right or wrong answers.

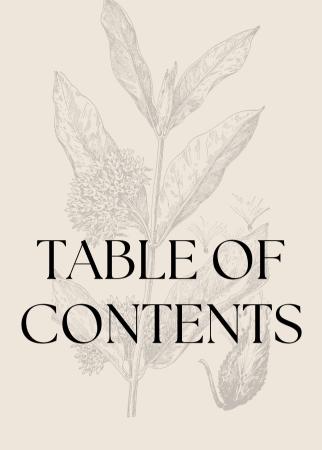
This journaling practice is rooted in self-reflection - not shame.

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.

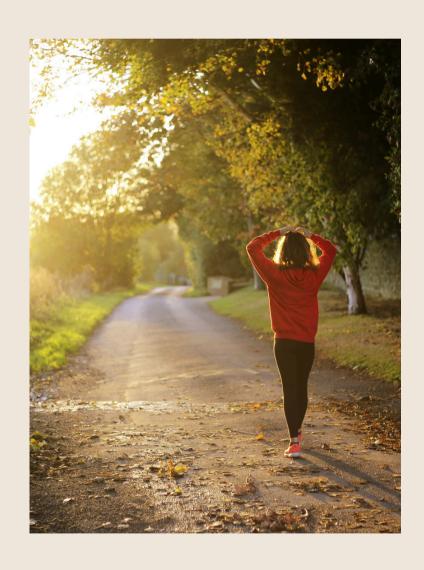
Work at your own pace. The journal is designed to be completed over approximately 6 weeks, but that is just a guideline. Do what works for you.



- 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?



DAY 1: DISCOMFORT

Suburban cultural norms place high value on the pursuit and maintenance of comfort, both materially and conversationally. As a suburban resident, how do you engage with these norms?

 Do I avoid uncomfortable conversations or situations? If so, what are the consequences of my conflict avoidance? If not, what helps me to resolve conflict so it does not become cyclical?

DAY 2: DISCOMFORT

Our behaviors are shaped by our values. Do you know what your values are concerning comfort? Try to define them.

 Do I believe my own comfort is more important than others? Or do I generally prioritize the comfort of others? Is that answer situational? ie: Is the answer different for my children or partner, versus a neighbor or someone I do not know very well?

DAY 3: DISCOMFORT

Physical comfort and emotional comfort are intertwined in complicated ways. Can you identify patterns in how those types of comfort coexist in your life?

- When seeking comfort, what steps do I take? What actions are comforting to me?
- How do I feel after engaging in my comforting and restful activities?

 How do I feel when I don't engage in comforting or restful activities?

DAY 4: DISCOMFORT

Our profit-driven modern culture has heavily monetized nearly every aspect of existence. Think about how your upbringing within this world-view shapes your actions when pursuing comfort.

•	Excluding basic needs (food, housing, healthcare etc.) do I often
	find myself purchasing items with the specific intent to increase
	my comfort?

Do I ever purchase items for myself, my home, or my family because it is the "thing to do," or it might make me comfortable about how others see me?

DAY 5: DISCOMFORT

We have spent the past few days exploring our values on comfort. These last questions may be a bit heavier to wrestle with, so take your time. Be prepared to return to these ideas in later chapters.

•	Do I buy my	comfort? Do	I seek ph	nysical and	emotional	comfort
	through the	acquisition of	of items?	How often	do I have t	to do
	that?					

 Are these physical consumption habits shaped by my desire to meet certain social norms, thus reducing potential conflict? Is my comfort rooted in or dependent on conflict avoidance?

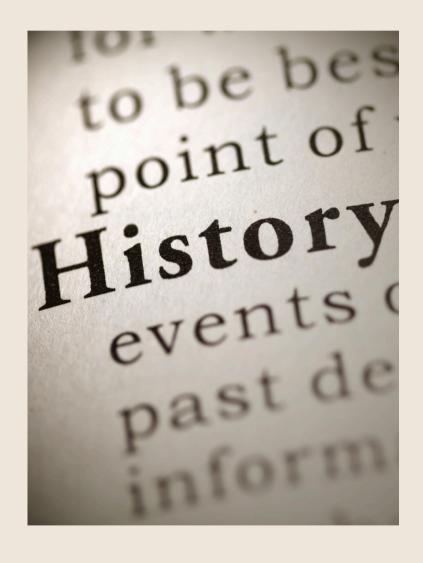
REST AND REFLECTION

Honor your emotions by focusing on what you *feel* after this week's reflections. If you experienced any moments of clarity or revelation this week, document those here. Alternatively, If you experienced frustration or discomfort when working through the reflections, try to articulate why.

Don't limit yourself to fully articulated sentences if that's not helpful to you. Make lists, draw a picture - whatever helps you to process and regroup for what comes next. (These reflection spaces will appear after each chapter.)

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.

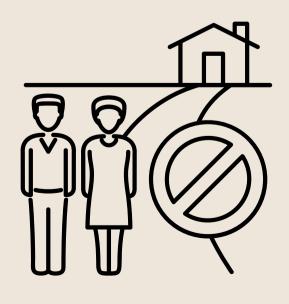
The rapid growth of a comfortable middle class (hello, Baby Boomers!) was celebrated as the peak of American Exceptionalism.

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?



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Think about what your schools taught you about suburbanization. What do you remember? Look up words you may not know from the previous page. Perhaps perform a quick Google search for phrases like "historic housing discrimination in the United States."

 How connected or disconnected do I feel to this negative side of modern American history? How often do I think about the ramifications of discriminatory practices in my daily life?

DAY 2: LIVING HISTORY

Towns or neighborhoods that historically enforced racial segregation after dark are referred to as "Sundown Towns."

Segregation is typically associated with the Deep South, however Sundown Towns were a form of segregation most prevalent in the Midwest and the West.

EXPLORE SOME DATA

 Navigate to https://justice.tougaloo.edu/map/ to review a distribution of verified and suspected Sundown Towns. Navigate around the interactive map, focusing on where you live now or areas you have lived in the past. What stands out to you?

DAY 3: LIVING HISTORY

Although explicitly discriminatory housing practices have been illegal for decades, rural and suburban communities still remain predominantly white across the nation. If it is not illegal for non-white residents to move to these areas, why aren't they?

EXPLORE SOME DATA

- Without looking it up, estimate the racial distribution of your own suburb or neighborhood.
- Check your estimate here: https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/
- Did you estimate correctly? Have you ever thought about this before?

DAY 4: LIVING HISTORY

Suburban whiteness relates more to whiteness as a cultural construct rather than a racial one. **Tokenized minorities** often exist in heavily white suburbs and towns, and are wielded by white residents as proof that the area is "**not racist**." However, **anti-racist** desegregation efforts appropriate for the modern era require much further reflection.

EXPLORE RECENT MEDIA

 Perform a Google search for the bolded terms above. Review recent media articles in the search results. What did you find? Can you think of examples in your own community or lived experiences?

DAY 5: LIVING HISTORY

Instead of the directly racist idea that white **IS** Right, modern suburbia is quietly ruled by the idea that white **SEEMS** right. Conformity to the norms established by historic whiteness shield suburban residents from reflecting on patterns of modern injustice.

SELF-REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS

•	How	do I	think	this	connects	to	overall	culture	and	patterns	of
	cons	ump	tion?								

• Are there any ways I can identify that I uphold a culture of

whiteness? • Are there specific areas I struggle to acknowledge my privilege?

REST AND REFLECTION

Honor your emotions by focusing on what you feel after navigating the heavy topic of racial discrimination both past and present.
Remind yourself that it is okay to hold space for negative emotions
like frustration and anger - either directed at vourself or others.

These are huge problems, with no clear individual or systemic solutions.

Give yourself space to process any discomfort, then get ready to walk forward with it into the next section.

WEEK 3

WHAT IS SUSTAINABILITY



SUSTAINABILITY DEFINED

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

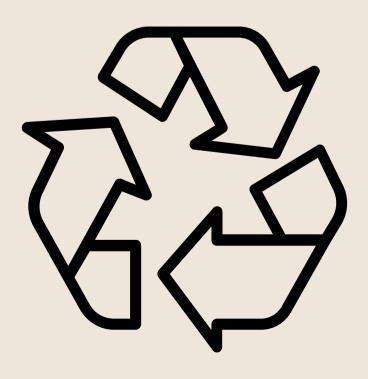
Defined simply, sustainable means the ability to be maintained at a certain rate.

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.

to learn in this section?



DAY 1: SUSTAINABLE LENSING

Framing sustainability as a philosophical concept as opposed to a static categorization can be helpful in broadening how we define and engage with sustainability on a personal level.

 Do I associate sustainability with purchasing certain items? Performing certain actions? Why or why not?
 Can I identify behaviors or habits in my own life that I would describe as unsustainable?

DAY 2: SUSTAINABLE LENSING

Think back to Chapter 1 about discomfort. Review your answers if you need to. Try to broaden those reflections now through the lens of sustainability.

 Are the ways I address or avoid confrontation sustainable? Can they be maintained at their current level without causing harm to myself or others? How does adding the lens of sustainability expand my thoughts from Chapter 1?

DAY 3: SUSTAINABLE LENSING

Review your answer to this question from Chapter 1: **Do I buy my comfort?**

 Are there specific ways I engage in unsustainable consumption or behaviors as a response to unsustainable emotional habits? How does this reflection make me feel right now? Am I prepared to walk with any discomfort this personal reflection brings?

DAY 4: SUSTAINABLE LENSING

It is the norm in our public discourse to refer to people as consumers. Consumption is a key marker of the "health" of our economy, yet overconsumption is a widely recognized harm to our planet.

 Do I identify with the label <u>consumer</u>? Why or why not? When I think of "systemic change" do I think of my own behavior as a component of the system that must change? Thinking back to Chapter 2 - How do I think suburban consumerism is connected to its historical whiteness?

DAY 5: SUSTAINABLE LENSING

Navigate to: Navigate to https://climate.mit.edu/ask-mit/how-can-we-reduce-climate-footprint-suburbs. Read the article, then think about how your individual actions intersect with any of the broader scale climate mitigation efforts outlined by these experts.

 Are there ways I could modify my consumption habits that would lead to more time, money or energy to apply to large-scale climate efforts?
 Do I believe that it is my responsibility to participate in those efforts? If not, who should be doing so?

REST AND REFLECTION

It might feel as if the topics we've reflected on so far are disjointed and unrelated to each other. Alternatively, you be finding clarity on how your own behaviors connect to the broader concepts of climate and social justice. Either is fine - There are no right or wrong answers. Your feelings are valid.

Take this space to list action items, vent frustrations, identify further topics you'd like to look into. Do whatever is practical to you and your reflective journey so far.

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?



DAY 1: WHAT"S IN A LAWN?

A lush green lawn is the quintessential symbol of suburban living. A neatly manicured lawn has long told the neighbors you care about the area, property values, and generally "being a good neighbor."

How do your own lawncare habits reflect your values?

 What does my lawn look like? Why do I keep it this way? Have I ever considered the impact of lawns, generally, on environmental health?

DAY 2: WHAT'S IN A LAWN

Per the EPA, 8 billion gallons of water are used for landscaping irrigation each day. Gas-powered lawn care equipment accounts for 13 billion pounds of annual pollution.

 Do I believe that lawns are worth these negative impacts? Why or why not?
 Thinking back to the <u>lens of sustainability</u> - Do I think these lawncare trends are able to be maintained at this rate?

DAY 3: WHAT'S IN A LAWN

In addition to air pollution and water usage on inedible lawns, suburban sprawl and the addition of new lawns to mow and blow is exacerbating already devastating levels of habitat loss for crucial pollinators and other invertebrates. But what is the alternative?

EXPLORE A BETTER WAY

- Navigate to https://www.monarchgard.com/
- Spend 10-15 minutes perusing the site. Look at photos and read some posts that jump out to you.

• Does the idea of replacing your front lawn with a prairie or a food garden make you uncomfortable? Why or why not?

DAY 4: WHAT'S IN A LAWN

In the same way that grass lawns originated as a symbol of wealth, expansive native gardens and fancy raised veggie beds may seem inaccessible to suburbanites with more moderate incomes.

- Are there ways that I can reduce my harmful lawncare practices within my budget?
- Reflect on the broader implication that healthful change is made by those who can afford it.

 Think back to Chapter 2: How does this relate to historic exclusion from wealth building opportunities like home ownership?

DAY 5: WHAT'S IN A LAWN

We've reflected on our behaviors concerning comfort, we've reviewed racial patters in suburbia, and we've practiced viewing concepts through a sustainable lens. In what ways do these ideas intersect with lawncare practices of suburbia today?

SELF-REFLECT ON THIS QUESTIONS

- Do I agree with this statement: Lawns are an unsustainable symbol of conformity to historic whiteness.
- To what extent does my ethical obligation to defy such a norm extend?

 How can I challenge myself to engage more about this in my community?

REST AND REFLECTION

Honor your emotions by focusing on what you feel after this week's exploration of lawns. Remind yourself that we are not seeking perfection, but rather reflection and connection.
After acknowledging that seemingly benign habits like lawncare can have <i>negative</i> impacts on the world around us, it becomes much easier to identify the <i>positive</i> impacts we can have on the world by engaging with all kinds of norms more intentionally.
Explor what that might mean for you in your own daily habits.

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 tempory discomfort as an investment into our sustainable future.

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



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Consumerist culture has conditioned us to prioritize more *stuff* for less *money*. Always look for a bargain. Pursue the cheapest option whenever possible. Getting *the most* is usually prioritized over getting *the best*.

REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS

 Do I figure environmental factors like responsible manufacturing processes or recyclability into my purchasing habits? Am I easily influenced by sales or trends to purchase more than I need?

DAY 2: WHAT DOES IT COST

The phrase **Reduce, Reuse, Recycle** is one we've all heard countless times. It's often criticized for being used by corporations to avoid accountability. But is it really as useless as we think?

 Do I consider reduce, reuse, recycle practical guidance for my life? Or do I associate it more with corporate greenwashing? Navigate to: https://www.epa.gov/recycle Spend 10-15 minutes perusing articles, then reconsider the first question.

DAY 3: WHAT DOES IT COST

Take into consideration the financial, social, and ethical costs of your overall consumption habits. From a sustainability perspective, how expensive is your life?

SELF-REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS

- Are there ways I can reduce and reuse better in my daily life?
- What kind of savings could I achieve if I did? (Think of emotional, financial, and environmental savings)

What could I do with those savings?

DAY 4: WHAT DOES IT COST

Adopting a more intentional and sustainable lifestyle may sound easy, but it is difficult to continue put into practice once it becomes apparent that there may be pushback or uncomfortable self-reflection to engage with as a result of our endeavors.

SELF-REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS

•	o I hold any negative beliefs about re-used, secondhand or
	ated items? Do I worry what people may think of my efforts?

• Thinking back to **Chapter 2** how do I think that suburban history has shaped my beliefs about this?

ways could I pr	ng with my d	liscomfort about

DAY 5: WHAT DOES IT COST

Beyond simply acknowledging the benefits of our privileged suburban lifestyles, a sustainable lifestyle requires us to actively seek out ways we as individuals can apply our privilege to changemaking endeavors within the context of our own lives. But at what cost?

SELF-REFLECT ON THESE QUESTIONS

•	What would it be like to buy discomfort?
•	In what ways could I wield my financial, social, and emotional

capital to defy unsustainable suburban norms in my daily life? • Am I willing to do so?

REST AND REFLECTION

We live in a world shaped by consumerism. Marketers take great care to encourage *more* consumption over *intentional* consumption. It takes a great deal of emotional energy to unpack that conditioning.

Learning to engage intentionally with our consumption habits by balancing our comfort, needs, and desire for change looks different for every individual. Remember that you can have boundaries and do <i>not</i> need to feel individually responsible to solve every issue.

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

DAY 1: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

In Chapter 1, we reflected on the idea of walking with our discomfort. Acknowledging that it is **okay** and sometimes **necessary** to be uncomfortable is foundational to creating sustainable change.

 Write down at least one goal for addressing an issue that makes you uncomfortable in your daily life or habits.
 How could you move forward with that discomfort in a way that creates enduring change in your life or habits?

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In Chapter 2 we reviewed the very basics of suburban history and the foundations that were built that created the norms we know today.

•	What topic of suburban history are you most interested in	ገ
	learning more about?	

•	Where co	uld you	find	more	inform	ation a	about t	hat topi	c?
		9							

 Where could you find more information about that topic? Is there anyone in your life that may join you in your journey to learn more on that issue?

DAY 3: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

In Chapter 3 we grappled with the intersectional concept of sustainability. We practiced looking at a variety of ideas through the lens of sustainability.

consumption
 How will I hold myself accountable to doing it? Is there anyone else in my life that might join me in a low waste journey?

DAY 4: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

In Chapter 4 we reflected on suburban lawns as an example of a seemingly harmless norm that actually has far reaching negative implications beyond our own property lines.

 Can you find any eco-friendly groups doing lawn and gardening activism in your community? You may start with your city or extension office for ideas. List 3 specific changes you could make on your own property to amplify healthy lawncare habits.

DAY 5: ACTIONS SPEAK LOUDER

In Chapter 5 we reflected on the financial, social and emotional costs of creating sustainable change and how we as individuals have variable levels of ability and responsibility to invest our privileges in a sustainable future.

 How much time and money can I realistically alot to "sustainability things" in my life right now? Designate a specific budget for time and money to start off. Reflect on a timeframe to reevaluate that budget at a specific interval.

REST AND REFLECTION

This is it! The final moment of reflection.

Take this space to do whatever it is you need to do. Review your answers, make lists, draw a picture, or even step away and save this page for another time. What you do here is your decision.

Remember to honor your emotions. Allow yourself to truly focus on how you feel as an individual existing within many complicated systems. This process will help you focus whatever your efforts may be as you develop a plan for taking action in your life.



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, remeber 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 sustainble world, remind yourself this:

The answer is you.

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