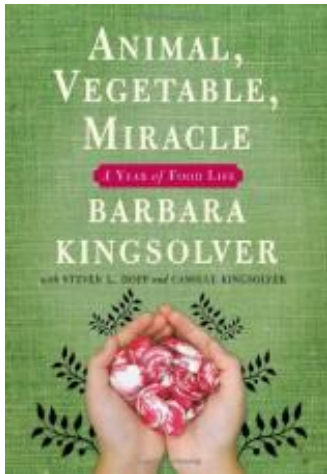


# Animal, Vegetable, Miracle: A Year of Food Life

by Barbara Kingsolver



## About the Book

Bestselling author Barbara Kingsolver returns with her first nonfiction narrative that will open your eyes in a hundred new ways to an old truth: You are what you eat.

*"As the U.S. population made an unprecedented mad dash for the Sun Belt, one carload of us paddled against the tide, heading for the Promised Land where water falls from the sky and green stuff grows all around. We were about to begin the adventure of realigning our lives with our food chain."*

"Naturally, our first stop was to buy junk food and fossil fuel. . . ."

Hang on for the ride: With characteristic poetry and pluck, Barbara Kingsolver and her family sweep readers along on their journey away from the industrial-food pipeline to a rural life in which they vow to buy only food raised in their own neighborhood, grow it themselves, or learn to live without it. Their good-humored search yields surprising discoveries about turkey sex life and overly zealous zucchini plants, en route to a food culture that's better for the neighborhood and also better on the table. Part memoir, part journalistic investigation, **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle** makes a passionate case for putting the kitchen back at the center of family life and diversified farms at the center of the American diet.

*"This is the story of a year in which we made every attempt to feed ourselves animals and vegetables whose provenance we really knew . . . and of how our family was changed by our first year of deliberately eating food produced from the same place where we worked, went to school, loved our neighbors, drank the water, and breathed the air."*

## Discussion Guide

1. What was your perception of America's food industry prior to reading **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle**? What did you

learn from this book? How has it altered your views on the way food is acquired and consumed?

2. In what ways, if any, have you changed your eating habits since reading **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle**? Depending on where you live --- in an urban, suburban, or rural environment --- what other steps would you like to take to modify your lifestyle with regard to eating local?

3. "It had felt arbitrary when we sat around the table with our shopping list, making our rules. It felt almost silly to us in fact, as it may now seem to you. Why impose restrictions on ourselves? Who cares?" asks Kingsolver in **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle**. Did you, in fact, care about Kingsolver's story and find it to be compelling? Why or why not? What was the family's aim for their year-long initiative, and did they accomplish that goal?

4. The writing of **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle** was a family affair, with Kingsolver's husband, Steven L. Hopp, contributing factual sidebars and her daughter, Camille Kingsolver, serving up commentary and recipes. Did you find that these additional elements enhanced the book? How so? What facts or statistics in **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle** surprised you the most?

5. How does each member of the Kingsolver-Hopp family contribute during their year-long eating adventure? Were you surprised that the author's children not only participated in the endeavor but that they did so with such enthusiasm? Why or why not?

6. "A majority of North Americans do understand, at some level, that our food choices are politically charged," says Kingsolver, "affecting arenas from rural culture to international oil cartels and global climate change." How do politics affect America's food production and consumption? What global ramifications are there for the food choices we make?

7. Kingsolver advocates the pleasures of seasonal eating, but she acknowledges that many people would view this as deprivation "because we've grown accustomed to the botanically outrageous condition of having everything always." Do you believe that American society can --- or will --- overcome the need for instant gratification in order to be able to eat seasonally? How does Kingsolver present this aspect in **Animal, Vegetable, Miracle**? Did you get the sense that she and her family ever felt deprived in their eating options?

8. Kingsolver points out that eating what we want, when we want comes "at a price." The cost, she says, "is not measured in money, but in untallied debts that will be paid by our children in the currency of extinctions, economic unravelings, and global climate change." What responsibility do we bear for keeping the environment safe for future generations? How does eating locally factor in to this?

9. Kingsolver asserts that "we have dealt to today's kids the statistical hand of a shorter life expectancy than their parents, which would be *us*, the ones taking care of them." How is our "thrown-away food culture" a detriment to children's health? She also says, "We're raising our children on the definition of promiscuity if we feed them a casual, indiscriminate mingling of foods from every season plucked from the supermarket." What responsibility do parents have to teach their children about the value and necessity of a local food culture?

10. In what ways do Kingsolver's descriptions of the places she visited on her travels --- Italy, New England, Montreal, and Ohio --- enhance her portrayal of local and seasonal eating?

11. "Marketing jingles from every angle lure patrons to turn our backs on our locally owned stores, restaurants, and farms," says Kingsolver. "And nobody considers that unpatriotic." How much of a role do the media play in determining what Americans eat? Discuss the decline of America's diversified family farms, and what it means for the country as a whole.

## Author Bio

Barbara Kingsolver was born in 1955 and grew up in rural Kentucky. She earned degrees in biology from DePauw University and the University of Arizona, and has worked as a freelance writer and author since 1985. At various times she has lived in England, France and the Canary Islands, and has worked in Europe, Africa, Asia, Mexico and South America. She spent two decades in Tucson, Arizona, before moving to southwestern Virginia where she currently resides.

Kingsolver was named one the most important writers of the 20th century by *Writers Digest*, and in 2023, she won a Pulitzer Prize for her novel *DEMON COPPERHEAD*. In 2000, she received the National Humanities Medal, our country's highest honor for service through the arts. Her books have been translated into more than 30 languages and have been adopted into the core curriculum in high schools and colleges throughout the nation.

Critical acclaim for her work includes multiple awards from the American Booksellers Association and the American Library Association, a James Beard award, two-time Oprah Book Club selection, and the National Book Award of South Africa, among others. She was awarded Britain's prestigious Women's Prize for Fiction (formerly the Orange Prize) for both *DEMON COPPERHEAD* and *THE LACUNA*, making Kingsolver the first author in the history of the prize to win it twice. In 2011, Kingsolver was awarded the Dayton Literary Peace Prize for the body of her work. She is a member of the American Academy of Arts and Letters.

She has two daughters, Camille and Lily. She and her husband, Steven Hopp, live on a farm in southern Appalachia where they raise an extensive vegetable garden and Icelandic sheep.

## Critical Praise

"Provocative . . . Kingsolver . . . evokes the sheer joy of producing one's own food."

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