

MAINE  
COAST  
SEMESTER  
at CHEWONKI



Dear Semesters 71 and 72,

We are excited to welcome you to Maine Coast Semester and to introduce you to your pre-semester reading assignment: **Octavia E. Butler's *Parable of the Sower***.

The **purpose of this pre-semester reading** is to begin our time together with a story that provides a preview of the themes that will be introduced in your courses and fieldwork. We hope this will set you up for a successful semester.

**Themes** within the text include:

- The personal relationship we each create with a place.
- The connections that exist between human and natural communities.
- The stories of place that have been passed down from generation to generation.
- The interdependent relationship between economic/political systems and ecosystems.
- The elements that contribute to human resilience, individual and communal.

**When you arrive on campus for the opening day of your semester, you should have completed reading *Parable of the Sower*. Use these questions to guide your reading and come prepared to do some writing related to them once you arrive:**

1. How do you see meaning-making, ethical, and religious structures emerging in *Parable of the Sower*? Which of these structures do you think have lost their purchase, and why? Which structures have gained purchase and why? When in your life have you experienced a meaning-making structure to lose relevance because of changing conditions, and how have new structures taken their place?
2. You met a variety of characters in this text. Identify a person that captured your attention because of their distinct relationship with place. Write one paragraph describing these individuals and their unique relationship to place.
3. What are the conditions - physical and cultural - that have led to the crisis in the book? Do you see any of these in our current reality and if so, how are they playing out in our communities and the broader world?

We will be discussing and writing about this book during our opening days. You are welcome to purchase a copy of the book, or borrow one from your local library. If you do purchase the book, we recommend that you bring it with you to support our discussion and writing.

As you begin to read this book, please know that parts of its content could be difficult to read or emotionally challenging to process. The book includes instances of violence, drug abuse, sexual activity, and the death of family members. If you notice yourself struggling with the contents of this novel, please reach out to a trusted adult, your advisor, or our mental health coordinator, Lydia Maier ([lmaier@chewonki.org](mailto:lmaier@chewonki.org)) for support.

If you are interested in learning more about Octavia Butler or *Parable of the Sower*, NPR's Throughline podcast has an excellent [episode from February 2021](#) about the writer and her work.

Please don't hesitate to contact us if anything is unclear to you.



Julie Barnes  
[jbarnes@chewonki.org](mailto:jbarnes@chewonki.org)  
Co-Director, Dean of Students & Chaplain  
Maine Coast Semester at Chewonki



Sarah Rebick  
[srebick@chewonki.org](mailto:srebick@chewonki.org)  
Co-Director & Dean of Academics  
Maine Coast Semester at Chewonki