

**Discussion Questions for “The Invention of Nature” by Andrea Wulf
January 29, 2022**

Humboldt was born in Prussia in 1768. Died in 1859. There are more places named after him than anyone else; even on the Moon. There are almost 350 plants and 100+ animals named after him.

- 1 - What is his definition of Nature?
- 2 - He got his definition from Goethe that Nature was best understood as poetry, by feelings. Is that a “scientific” understanding?
- 3 - It is said he had a radical definition of Culture. What was it? How is it Radical? What do you think? (Chapter 12).
- 4 - How did politics and war impact on his research?
- 5 – Which of today’s concerns (i.e. climate change, deforestation, loss of species, colonialism, slavery, etc.)was he troubled about?
- 6 - Is Wulf’s book best understood as a biography? The sub-title is “Humboldt’s new World “. Wolf has written primarily about “gardening” (“Founding Gardeners” is the title of one of her books).
- 7 - He wrote 34 volumes of notes on various trips! How important was his trip to Venezuela? Down the Orinoco River? Up Mt. Chimborazo? To the U.S.? His Russian trip?
- 8 - How important was his network of correspondents? “The Republic of Letters.” See “The Structure of Scientific Revolutions” by Thomas Kuhn.
- 9 – Which adventure of Humboldt’s was your favorite?
- 10 - Which of his adventures sounded scariest to you? To him?
- 11- How did his writings influence Darwin? Thoreau? Muir? And Bolivar?