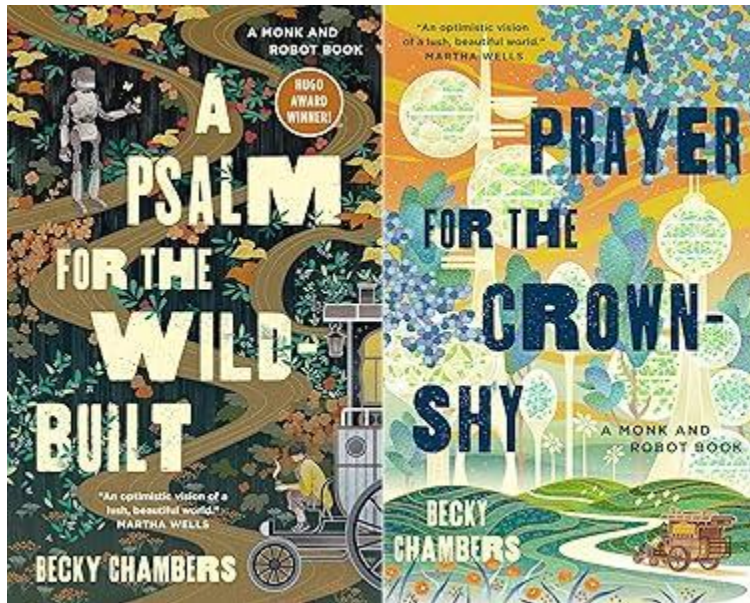# IDH2930: Exploring Purpose and Identity in Becky Chambers's *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* and *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy* (Honors)

1 credit

I. General Information

Meeting days and times: T 4 (12:30-1:45 pm)
Class location: Online
Instructor(s):
    Name: Jessi Elana Aaron
    Office Building/Number: Dauer 153
    Phone: 352-392-2016
    Email: jeaaron@ufl.edu
    Office Hours: by appointment

Course Description

In Becky Chambers's *Monk and Robot* series, we step into a gentle, post-industrial world where humanity has chosen balance over conquest, and the robots who once served have vanished—until one returns, centuries later, with a single question: *What do people need?*

Told across two novellas—*A Psalm for the Wild-Built* and *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy*—this series follows a tea monk named Dex and a robot named Mosscap as they travel through wild forests and quiet villages, grappling with some of the biggest questions we can ask: What gives life meaning? Is it enough just to *be*? What happens when you don't know your purpose?

Unlike fast-paced sci-fi driven by conflict, these books offer something far more rare: a stillness that invites reflection, a friendship built on curiosity and care, and a deeply hopeful vision of the future. They are short but profound, strange but familiar—stories that stay with you long after the final page.

If you've ever asked yourself *why you do what you do*, or *what it means to be enough*, this is the world you've been waiting to visit.

Prerequisites: None

General Education Designation:

All General Education area objectives can be found here.

Course Materials

- Becky Chambers, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* (local bookstores)
- Becky Chambers, *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy* (local bookstores)
- Reading course pack (Canvas)

Materials will be available through the following means:
The main textbooks for the course, *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* and *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy*, are available for purchase in local bookstores and online in paperback and kindle formats. Supplemental readings will be uploaded to Canvas and can be accessed free of charge there.

Students are encouraged to employ critical thinking and to rely on data and verifiable sources to interrogate all assigned readings and subject matter in this course as a way of determining whether they agree with their classmates and/or their instructor. No lesson is intended to espouse, promote, advance, inculcate, or compel a particular feeling, perception, viewpoint or belief.

Materials Fee: N/A

II. Student Learning Outcomes

A student who successfully completes this course will be able to:

- Critically analyze interdisciplinary texts: Evaluate key passages from *A Psalm for the Wild-Built* and *A Prayer for the Crown-Shy*, alongside brief philosophical readings, to uncover how these works challenge traditional ideas about purpose and human identity.
- Engage in reflective and constructive dialogue: Contribute thoughtfully to weekly online discussions and Zoom meetings, articulating and defending interpretations while integrating perspectives from both literature and philosophy.
- Synthesize and express personal insights: Produce a well-organized reflective essay or creative project that integrates insights from course readings, online discussions, and Zoom sessions to form a cohesive analysis of purpose and the human experience.

Creative formats (e.g., a short story, comic, or visual narrative) are welcome, so long as they engage thoughtfully with the course themes.

III. Graded Work

Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found in the Catalog.

Graded Components
1. **Weekly Discussion Posts** (40%): Short reflections on weekly readings.
2. **Participation** (25%): Active participation in discussions and activities.
3. **Final Project** (25%): A final reflective essay or creative project (visual presentation, short story) that connects the themes of the novel to broader social issues.
4. **Final Presentation** (10%): A 5-minute in-class presentation on the final project.

TOTAL: 100%

Grading Scale

Letter Grade	Number Grade
A	100-93
A-	92-90
B+	89-87
B	86-83
B-	82-80
C+	79-77
C	76-73
C-	72-70
D+	69-67
D	66-63
D-	62-60
E	59-0

See the UF Catalog's "Grades and Grading Policies" for information on how UF assigns grade points.

Note: A minimum grade of C is required to earn General Education credit.

A minimum grade of B is required to earn Academic points towards your Honors Completion Requirements. (Exception: Honors Quest I and II sections require a C). Once you have earned your final grade in this course, please upload the course information and final grade from your Unofficial Transcript into your Honors Canvas Cohort: Honors Completion module to earn Honors Milestone / Completion credit.

IV. Calendar

Date	Topic	Readings/Preparation	Work Due
July 1, 2025	Introduction to *Monk and Robot* and course overview	None	None
July 8, 2025	Ideas of calling, discontent, and what it means to choose a new path	• *Psalm*, Ch. 1–3 • Purpose in Life Quiz (self-reflection) • Living Life in Service vs. Servitude	Weekly Discussion
July 15, 2025	First contact, questions of personhood, purpose	• *Psalm*, Chapters 4–6 • The AI Sentience Debate • AI Can Beat Humans at Their Own Game	Weekly Discussion
July 22, 2025	What does it mean to be useful—or not?	• *Psalm*, Ch. 7–8, and *Prayer*, Ch. 1 • How to Make Your Life Matter (Even If It Lacks Purpose and Direction) • A Disabled Life Is a Life Worth Living	Weekly Discussion
July 29, 2025	Questioning the nature of help, service, and uncertainty	• *Prayer*, Ch. 2–4 • What Is a Disabled Life Worth? • Transhumanism 101 – Eternal Life	Weekly Discussion
August 5, 2025	Culmination of the journey: connection, ambiguity, and rest	• *Prayer*, Ch. 5–6 • What We Owe One Another. Thoreau, Kierkegaard, The Human… • "Finding the Mother Tree - Discovering the Wisdom of the Forest"	Final project

V. University Policies and Resources

Attendance policy
Requirements for class attendance and make-up exams, assignments, and other work in this course are consistent with university policies that can be found at:
https://catalog.ufl.edu/ugrad/current/regulations/info/attendance.aspx.

Students requiring accommodation
Students who experience learning barriers and would like to request academic accommodations should connect with the disability Resource Center by visiting
https://disability.ufl.edu/students/get-started/. It is important for students to share their accommodation letter with their instructor and discuss their access needs, as early as possible in the semester.

UF course evaluation process
Students are expected to provide professional and respectful feedback on the quality of instruction in this course by completing course evaluations online via GatorEvals. Guidance on how to give feedback in a professional and respectful manner is available at http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/students. Students will be notified when the evaluation period opens and can complete evaluations through the email they receive from GatorEvals, in their Canvas course menu under GatorEvals, or via http://ufl.bluera.com/ufl/. Summaries of course evaluation results are available to students at http://gatorevals.aa.ufl.edu/public-results/.

University Honesty Policy
University of Florida students are bound by the Honor Pledge. On all work submitted for credit by a student, the following pledge is required or implied: "On my honor, I have neither given nor received unauthorized aid in doing this assignment." The Student Honor Code and Conduct Code (Regulation 4.040) specifies a number of behaviors that are in violation of this code, as well as the process for reported allegations and sanctions that may be implemented. All potential violations of the code will be reported to Student Conduct and Conflict Resolution. If a student is found responsible for an Honor Code violation in this course, the instructor will enter a Grade Adjustment sanction which may be up to or including failure of the course. For additional information, see https://sccr.dso.ufl.edu/policies/student-honor-code-student-conduct-code/.

In-class recording
Students are allowed to record video or audio of class lectures. However, the purposes for which these recordings may be used are strictly controlled. The only allowable purposes are (1) for personal educational use, (2) in connection with a complaint to the university, or (3) as evidence in, or in preparation for, a criminal or civil proceeding. All other purposes are prohibited. Specifically, students may not publish recorded lectures without the written consent of the instructor.

A "class lecture" is an educational presentation intended to inform or teach enrolled students about a particular subject, including any instructor-led discussions that form part of the presentation, and delivered by any instructor hired or appointed by the University, or by a guest instructor, as part of a University of Florida course. A class lecture does not include lab sessions, student presentations, clinical presentations such as patient history, academic exercises involving solely student participation, assessments (quizzes, tests, exams), field trips, private conversations between students in the class or between a student and the faculty or guest lecturer during a class session.

Publication without permission of the instructor is prohibited. To "publish" means to share, transmit, circulate, distribute, or provide access to a recording, regardless of format or medium, to another person (or persons), including but not limited to another student within the same class section. Additionally, a recording, or transcript of a recording, is considered published if it is posted on or uploaded to, in whole or in part, any media platform, including but not limited to social media, book, magazine, newspaper, leaflet, or third-party-note/tutoring services. A student who publishes a recording without written consent may be subject to a civil cause of action instituted by a person injured by the publication and/or discipline under UF Regulation 4.040

Student Honor Code and Student Conduct Code.

Procedure for conflict resolution

Any classroom issues, disagreements or grade disputes should be discussed first between the instructor and the student. If the problem cannot be resolved, please contact Honors advisor (advisor@honors.ufl.edu, 352-392-1519). Be prepared to provide documentation of the problem, as well as all graded materials for the semester. Issues that cannot be resolved departmentally will be referred to the University Ombuds Office (http://www.ombuds.ufl.edu; 352-392-1308) or the Dean of Students Office (http://www.dso.ufl.edu; 352-392-1261).

Resources available to students

Health and Wellness

- U Matter, We Care: umatter@ufl.edu; 352-392-1575.
- Counseling and Wellness Center: http://www.counseling.ufl.edu; 352-392-1575.
- Sexual Assault Recovery Services (SARS): Student Health Care Center; 352-392-1161.
- University Police Department: http://www.police.ufl.edu/; 352-392-1111 (911 for emergencies).

Academic Resources

- E-learning technical support: learning-support@ufl.edu; https://elearning.ufl.edu; 352-392-4357.
- Career Connections Center: Reitz Union; http://www.career.ufl.edu/; 352-392-1601.
- Library Support: http://cms.uflib.ufl.edu/ask.
- Academic Resources: 1317 Turlington Hall; 352-392-2010; https://academicresources.clas.ufl.edu.
- Writing Studio: 2215 Turlington Hall; http://writing.ufl.edu/writing-studio/.
- Honors Program: 201 Walker Hall, 352-392-1519

    o Quick questions for an Honors advisor? Email advisor@honors.ufl.edu
    o Need an Honors advising appointment? Schedule via Microsoft Bookings: https://bit.ly/ufhonorsadvising