

CREATIVE READING WORKSHOP GUIDE

Welcome.

Before we begin, some information about this project.

Through reading, deep listening, questioning, and personal reflection, we will explore some of the theoretical frameworks of Black, indigenous, and queer traditions informing contemporary creative movements of reclamation and healing.

Since July, The Mount has been working with artist-in-residence Lia Russell-Self and community partner Raei Bridges of The Rusty Anvil as part of the Artist-At-Work Western Mass pilot.

Conceived as a WPA-like program for the 21st century. Artists At Work (AAW) provides six months of employment for Lia to develop a project in collaboration with The Mount and The Rusty Anvil.

Artists are the messengers who will lead us into the future—their work will help us to understand our new world; their creativity and inspirations will both express and allow us to maintain our humanity through trials that feel inconceivable. At the time of AAW's launch, our musicians, fine artists, filmmakers, theater makers, writers, and dancers are suffering grave financial circumstances; their incomes are being decimated, and many can't pay rent let alone make art. AAW is at once a rescue package and a plan for the future—an ambitious effort to both safeguard and amplify the vital role art and artists play as we move together into a new world.¹

Collectively, and lead by Lia's vision for what they would want to create, this project, RECLAIM YOUR LIBERATION, provides opportunities for QTBIPOC in the Berkshires to find healing community in nature and opportunities for creative expression. In this moment of ongoing and overlapping traumas which disproportionately effect the QTBIPOC community locally and nationally, the need to create healing spaces (virtually, on the land, in the community) was the starting place for this work. As we continue to work together, different paths of exploration have emerged. The Creative Reading Series is but one of them.

This reading series presents an opportunity for those without the lived experience of homophobia and racism, myself included, to learn from contemporary and historical thinkers and artists, and support a future which understands the implicit and explicit biases built into institutional and societal structures. Further, I hope it will offer new ways of collective imagining by the artist-messengers who will lead us into the future.

I am extraordinarily grateful to Artists-at-Work for their leadership in the field and to Lia and Raei for welcoming me into this collective imagining. Thank you for bringing your inquisitive self to this program.

Gratefully,

Michelle Daly, Public Programs Director, The Mount

¹ "About Us," ARTISTS AT WORK, accessed October 7, 2020, <https://www.artists-at-work.org/>.

GROUP AGREEMENTS

Online sessions will be opportunities for us to ask questions, unpack assumptions and learn from one another. I suggest the following starting agreements to guide these conversations.

- None of us are experts, but we each bring our learned and lived experience to the group.
- Assume positive intent. Give others the benefit of the doubt, and ask clarifying or probing questions.

GLOSSARY

Cis(gender): term for someone who exclusively identifies as their sex assigned at birth. The term cisgender is not indicative of gender expression, sexual orientation, hormonal makeup, physical anatomy, or how one is perceived in daily life. Adjective that means “identifies as their sex assigned at birth” derived from the Latin word meaning “on the same side.” A cisgender/cis person is not transgender. “Cisgender” does not indicate biology, gender expression, or sexuality/sexual orientation. In discussions regarding trans issues, one would differentiate between women who are trans and women who aren’t by saying trans women and cis women. Cis is not a “fake” word and is not a slur. Note that cisgender does not have an “ed” at the end.

Ecocriticism: is the study of the relationship between literature, art, and the environment. It is an intellectual movement that began to formally cohere in the early 1990s. Its aims included drawing attention to 1. everything being connected—especially nature and culture, 2. our definitions of humanity being rooted in our cultural norms and languages, and 3. a commitment to the health, well-being, and sustainability of our natural environments. From its inception, the movement announced itself as being universally relevant to and concerned about “all” people, but suffered from a very obvious lack of racial, ethnic, economic, and gender diversity.

Gender Identity: describes the psychological recognition of oneself as being a member of a certain gender. Gender identity is determined by a person's *internal* perceptions; it is separate from physical sex, which is an absolute that's determined before birth.

Gender Expression: external manifestation of one's gender identity, usually expressed through “masculine,” “feminine” or gender-variant behavior, clothing, haircut, voice or body characteristics.

Genderqueer is an identity taken on by a variety of people who feel that, in some way, the very substance of their genders lies outside the gender binary's two labels of “male” and “female.”

Institutional Oppression: is the systematic mistreatment of people within a social identity group, supported and enforced by the society and its institutions. Institutional oppression occurs when established laws, customs, and practices systematically reflect and produce inequalities based on one's membership in targeted social identity groups. Institutional oppression creates a system of invisible barriers limiting people based on their membership in disfavored social identity groups. The barriers are only invisible to those 'seemingly' unaffected by it. The practice of institutionalized oppression is based on the belief in inherent superiority or inferiority.

Intersectionality: was originally articulated on behalf of black women, the term brought to light the invisibility of many constituents within groups that claim them as members, but often fail to represent them. Intersectional erasures are not exclusive to black women. People of color within LGBTQ movements; girls of color in the fight against the school-to-prison pipeline; women within immigration movements; trans women within feminist movements; and people with disabilities fighting police abuse — all face vulnerabilities that reflect the intersections of racism, sexism, class oppression, transphobia, able-ism and more. Intersectionality has given many advocates a way to frame their circumstances and to fight for their visibility and inclusion. For example, the first and second wave of feminism were said to include all women, but left out many women of color, queer women, and trans women.

QTBIPOC: Acronym that stands for Queer, Trans, Black, Indigenous, People of Color

Race is a social construct that artificially divides people into distinct groups based on characteristics such as physical appearance (particularly color), ancestral heritage, cultural affiliation, cultural history, ethnic classification, and the social, economic and political needs of a society at a given period of time. Racial categories subsume ethnic groups

Settler Colonialism: is a distinct type of colonialism that functions through the replacement of indigenous populations with an invasive settler society that, over time, develops a distinctive identity and sovereignty. Settler colonial states include Canada, the United States, Australia, and South Africa.

White Privilege: A privilege is a right, favor, advantage, immunity, specially granted to one individual or group, and withheld from another.

White privilege is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of: (1) preferential prejudice for and treatment of white people based solely on their skin color and/or ancestral origin from Europe; and (2) exemption from racial and/or national oppression based on skin color and/or ancestral origin from Africa, Asia, the Americas and the Arab world.

White Supremacy: White supremacy is an historically based, institutionally perpetuated system of exploitation and oppression of continents, nations, and peoples of color by white peoples and nations of the European continent for the purpose of maintaining and defending a system of wealth, power and privilege.

WEEK ONE

This week's readings explore the ways in which nature as understood through a lens of European enlightenment erases space for QTBIPOC. In particular, we'll read about why QTBIPOC spaces are necessary for healing, read about ecocriticism from the perspective of a Black feminist scholar and read *It's a Bird!*, a new magical realism comic by Christian Cooper.

Reading:

<https://arrow-journal.org/why-people-of-color-need-spaces-without-white-people/>

<https://atmos.earth/black-feminist-ecological-thought-essay/>

<https://www.comixology.com/Represent-2020-1-Its-a-Bird/> - you will need to add to cart to read, but there is no charge.

WEEK TWO

This week's readings will look at the construct of whiteness. While there are many excellent thinkers looking at this topic, I've selected a few short readings to give you an introduction including a short essay from James Baldwin and an essay by Elissa Washuta a member of the Cowlitz Indian tribe. Ruby Sales' conversation with Krista Tippett is included as well. You can either listen to the conversation and/or read the transcript at the link below.

Reading:

James Baldwin, "The White Man's Guilt"

<http://wetipthebalance.org/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/The-White-Mans-Guilt-James-Baldwin.pdf>

Reading:

Elissa Washuta, "Apocolypse Logic"

<https://theoffingmag.com/insight/apocalypse-logic/>

Listen:

Ruby Sales in conversation with Krista Tippett

<https://onbeing.org/programs/ruby-sales-where-does-it-hurt/>

WEEK THREE

This week's reading introduces "wake work" defined by Christina Sharpe as "a way for me to think about the persistence of Black death — what Saidiya Hartman calls the 'afterlife of slavery' — and the persistence of Black life, the ways in which Black people nonetheless make spaces of joy. Wake work is the work that we Black people do in the face of our ongoing death, and the ways we insist life into the present."

Reading:

Christina Sharpe, Introduction, *In the Wake: On Blackness on Being*
https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-0-8223-6294-4_601.pdf

Interview: "Sadiya Hartman on insurgent histories and the abolitionist imaginary"
<https://www.artforum.com/interviews/saidiya-hartman-83579>

WEEK FOUR

In *Black Shoals* Tiffany Lethabo King introduces the shoal as a metaphor for the simultaneously distinct yet edgeless relationship between Blackness and Indigeneity.

Reading:

Introduction, *The Black Shoals*
https://www.dukeupress.edu/Assets/PubMaterials/978-1-4780-0636-7_601.pdf

WEEK FIVE

Emergent Strategy by adrienne marie brown offers a new language to talk about healing, growth, liberation, forgiveness, and change. Inspired by Octavia Butler, Grace Lee Boggs and others. brown articulates the need for imagination and future visioning.

Reading:

Emergent Strategy
<https://static1.squarespace.com/static/5ad0d247af209613040b9ceb/t/5db5a44b0e6ba42da976cce7/1572185168567/brown+2017-Emergent+Strategy+full+book.pdf>

ADDITIONAL READINGS AND RESOURCES

adrienne maree brown [*Emergent Strategy: Shaping Change, Changing Worlds*](#)

Ta-Nehisi Coates “[The Case for Reparations](#),” Atlantic Magazine

Frantz Fanon [*Black Skin White Masks*](#)

Carolyn Finney [*Black Faces, White Spaces: Reimagining the Relationship of African Americans to the Great Outdoors*](#)

Saidiya Hartman [*Wayward Lives: Beautiful Experiments*](#)

- [*Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*](#)

Robin Wall Kimmerer [*Braiding Sweetgrass: Indigenous Wisdom, Scientific Knowledge and The Teachings of Plants*](#)

Tiffany Lethabo King [*The Black Shoals: Offshore Formations Of Black and Native Studies*](#)

Katherine McKittrick, ed. [*Sylvia Wynter: On Being Human as Praxis*](#)

Jaamil Kosoko Olawe “[A Syllabus for Survival](#)”

Lean Penniman [*Farming While Black: Soul Fire Farms Practical Guide to Liberation on the Land*](#)

Claudia Rankine, “[On Whiteness](#),” recorded lecture, courtesy of Howlround

Christina Sharpe [*In The Wake: On Blackness And Being*](#)

Beverly Daniel Tatum [*Why Are All the Black Kids Sitting Together in The Cafeteria: And Other Conversations About Race*](#)