

Purposeful Collaboration

Fall 2021

“Alone we can do so little; together we can do so much” – Helen Keller

“Me, We.” -Muhammad Ali

“We shall walk together on this path of life, for all things are part of the universe and are connected with each other to form one whole unity.” -Maria Montessori



Photo: Russell Neighborhood Mural

Dead Stars

By Ada Limón

Out here, there's a bowing even the trees are doing.

Winter's icy hand at the back of all of us.
Black bark, slick yellow leaves, a kind of stillness that feels

so mute it's almost in another year.

I am a hearth of spiders these days: a nest of trying.

We point out the stars that make Orion as we take out

the trash, the rolling containers a song of suburban thunder.

It's almost romantic as we adjust the waxy blue

recycling bin until you say, Man, we should really learn

some new constellations.

And it's true. We keep forgetting about Antlia, Centaurus,

Draco, Lacerta, Hydra, Lyra, Lynx.

But mostly we're forgetting we're dead stars too, my mouth is full

of dust and I wish to reclaim the rising—

to lean in the spotlight of streetlight with you, toward

what's larger within us, toward how we were born.

Look, we are not unspectacular things.

We've come this far, survived this much.

What

would happen if we decided to survive more? To love harder?

What if we stood up with our synapses and flesh and said, No.

No, to the rising tides.

Stood for the many mute mouths of the sea, of the land?

What would happen if we used our bodies to bargain

for the safety of others, for earth,

if we declared a clean night, if we stopped being terrified,

if we launched our demands into the sky, made ourselves so big

people could point to us with the arrows they make in their minds,

rolling their trash bins out, after all of this is over?

Overview

Why do we need each other? Community is a survival technique. It is how we can get everything we need. How else did our ancestors survive on the cusp of humanity? At the beginning, we shared food in order to have enough; shelter in order to keep one another safe. But living is more than surviving; it is about experiencing our life with others. It is only when we lived together that we developed language, stories, culture: living together is what defines our humanity. Living in community is not about proximity. It is not enough to be neighbors. It is about building something bigger than any one individual.

And yet, sometimes, it's difficult to feel these connections. Over the past year, we all had the experience of being physically separate, which could make us feel lonely and lost. And being together can be challenging, or even catastrophic. Not all families are loving. Not all relationships are healthy. Together, people have built cities, cured diseases, and created art. But we have also perpetuated racism and participated in war.

We are together again, but what does that mean? A year apart made us reevaluate what was important. Many of the old systems are broken, or even oppressive. The way forward cannot be the way things have always been. As we reenter life, as we begin again in *this* community, how do we work together in a way that is both productive and unprecedented?

There is no one like you in this world, but first hand experience is not the only path to empathy. What we share--our time, our culture, our earth--can transcend what makes us unique. It is by working together, through purposeful collaboration, that we can be something greater than our parts. For how can we solve the problems of the world if not together?

Guiding Questions

- ★ What does it mean to live in community?
- ★ How can I develop and express empathy?
- ★ How can we serve the greater good without sacrificing what makes us unique?
- ★ What are some problems that can only be solved collaboratively, and how can we work towards these solutions?

What We Will Learn

- ★ Strategies for seminar and group work.
- ★ The problems of the literary canon and only centering a single story.
- ★ Ways to deepen our understanding of another cultural experience through our reading and research.
- ★ Researching effectively by staying mindful of bias and credibility.

What We Will Do

- ★ Create a class poem.
- ★ Learn Montessori's Fourth Great Lesson, The Coming of Humans.
- ★ Attend World Fest to explore our city's cultural diversity.
- ★ Engage in seminar, and create class norms that work for our group.
- ★ Read a book with a small group that centers the experience of a person not living in the United States.
- ★ Work collaboratively to research a problem or issue, and present a solution to the class.