

# THE CHANGE AGENT

Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

September 2002

Issue 15



This issue of *The Change Agent* is a slight departure from our usual focus on a social justice theme. Instead of focusing on what changes are needed in our society, we've focused on a way that change can come about—through unleashing human creativity. We explore how teachers, students, artists, and others have brought about changes in themselves and their communities through engaging in creative activities and suggest ways for others to do the same.

We found trying to define what creative expression might mean to be an overwhelming task, so we tried to cast the net as wide as possible to include examples that, we hope, will speak to a variety of readers. As a result, the articles and activities in this issue reflect many forms of creativity: creative teaching, visual arts, theater, word rendering, sculpture, mask-making, music, humor, radio, film, poetry, folk art, and other forms.

Something different you'll find in this issue is a focus on personal change. *The Change Agent* usually includes writing that helps to prepare readers for participation in social change by providing pertinent information about a topic and suggestions for action. This time, we wanted to include writing on what helps us prepare ourselves for moving toward such activism. What do we need to know about ourselves, how do we have to feel about our lives, what do we have to wrestle with so that we are more effective advocates and activists? We believe that strengthening ourselves by taking our own growth and development seriously is an important first step to making changes in community and society. Because our ability to contribute to a better world begins with a belief in ourselves, we've included a whole section about how creative expression can develop our strength, elicit hope, and build a sense of self that guides us toward action in the broader context.

We hope this issue will inspire, excite, and reinvigorate you, and that it will encourage you to invent and hope and courageously try new ways to make change in your life and your world.

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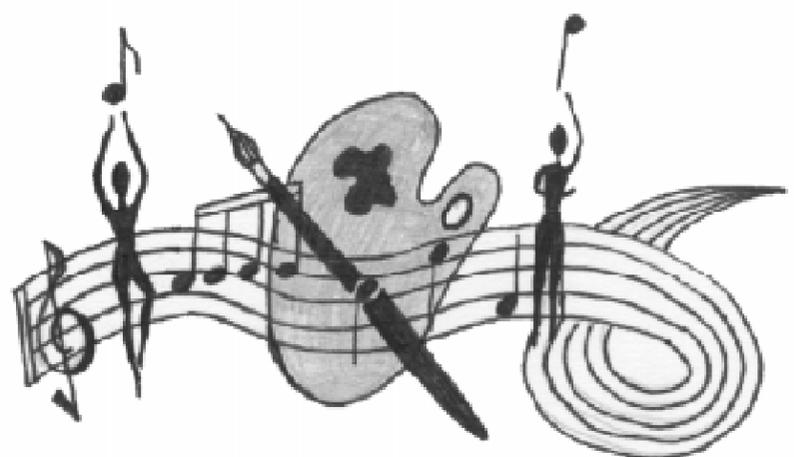
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Imagine an empty space. No walls, no boundaries—just an empty space. How does it feel to be there? What colors and shapes start to appear? What lines and textures do you add? Now clear your mind. A blank slate. What daydreams do you have? What thoughts? Any words or rhythms? How about voices? Sit still and relax. How does your body feel? Do you want to move? Where and how? Sit back and enjoy the ride. It's the ride that counts, not the destination.

Let go of all the constraints that bind. Free yourself and see where that takes you. Explore. Creativity is about living in the moment. It's about being playful, even mischievous. It's also about focus and self-knowledge.

Maxine Green, Professor of Education at Columbia University, says using our creative imagination can help “lessen the social paralysis we see around us and restore a sense that something can be done;” that something can come of our hopes. Green says, “Imagination will always come into play when becoming literate suggests an opening of spaces . . . a consciousness of the right to ask why.” All of us are capable of creativity and creative expression. But how many of us use our own creativity consistently? How many of us consciously encourage it in others?

Creative expression can be both a goal in itself and an entry point into the learning process. Consider music, for example. There is research to indicate that music enhances the learning of young children. Is it reasonable to assume that the Mozart Effect can help adults as well? Why wouldn't it be? Many learners self-identify as bodily-kinesthetic learners (not necessarily using these words). Bodily-kinesthetic learners understand best when their bodies are encouraged to feel the learning. Visual learners need to “see” things. Those with a musical intelligence move to the rhythms in their bodies. Is it not reasonable, therefore, to think that a multi-modal approach to learning could enable many of the bodily-kinesthetic, musical, and visual learners to learn better?

As a goal in itself is encouraging creativity justified? One consideration is that creative approaches in learning have the potential to reach those who have been failed by traditional education systems and can enhance a learner's self-esteem. In addition, creativity fits into the synthesis category, one of the highest orders of thinking skill in Bloom's Taxonomy.

So, what's the problem? Why is creative expression so often ignored or downplayed in education? What prevents creativity from being given more attention and focus? There are, unfortunately, many obstacles.

One difficulty is budget constraints. Our field, along with all of education, is undergoing financial cutbacks. Since creativity and the arts have most often been perceived to be frivolous by those who create and manage budgets, creativity is the first to go in tight financial times. Without money, it's difficult to buy art supplies, print a book of student writings or encourage learners to write and perform a play. It is an important statement about educational priority that the Massachusetts ABE Curriculum Frameworks originally had seven topics, but now only have six. The Arts Curriculum Framework is the missing topic area.

A second problem is time. With so many demands on the time of programs and teachers related to tighter academic standards, higher stakes reporting, and closer scrutiny from a variety of sources, who has time to devote to creative writing and music appreciation? How would a program justify spending 8–10 weeks on rehearsing and performing a play when there are waiting lists all over the state?

Then there is the resistance factor. How many learners walk through the door and say they want to work on poetry writing? Since when do students list dramatizing a play as a goal? And how many teachers would look eagerly at a chance to use music for learning math or the English language? Of course, there are a handful of teachers and students who would jump into such projects with unparalleled enthusiasm. But the more likely student responses are, “Do I have to?” or “How will this help me get my GED?”

Of course, we can't forget the logistical limitations such as space, class design, and hours spent in class. Visual art, movement and theater work require space. Many programs' class designs and physical layouts are not conducive to large groups of students spending hours on certain kinds of creative work.

The current bureaucratic focus on accountability is another reason to put creative expression on the back burner. Can you count outcomes of creativity? Can you measure it? Can you get a job if you are a more creative thinker than you were when you walked in the door of an ABE program? No, no, and probably not. You probably could count the number of poems a person wrote or the number of pictures he/she drew. But how would you report them for the National Reporting System? Some might say, what good are they?

Perhaps the biggest obstacle to encouraging creativity in the classroom is that explicit connections between learning objectives or standards and creative expression do not yet exist. Teachers don't necessarily see the connections. If they are not evident in the standards, those interested in the learning results would not be interested in knowing about the impact that creativity has on outcomes. Teachers might suspect the connections are there, but connections are not clear at the present time. If educators themselves haven't found them yet, then they would be hard pressed to explain the potential connections to policymakers.

So, what can we, as a field, do to overcome these obstacles to nurturing creativity in adult learners? How can we encourage inclusion of creative expression in teaching and learning? There are no easy answers. But we need to start. Without creativity, our lives would be meager indeed. Imagine life without buildings, films, plays, music, dance, photographs, and poetry. Imagine having no literature to read in class. Imagine a world void of creative solutions to serious problems and of hope that things can be different.

There are actually some things we can do to break this dilemma. We can create small creative projects that fit in with student, classroom, and program goals. We can create low-cost alternatives such as self-publishing of student work, grant-funded projects, connecting with existing arts organizations to provide mentoring in return for volunteer work from the students and/or program. We can provide teachers with support or staff development to encourage creative expression in the classroom. We can face down our fears and self-consciousness and make time and energy available in our own lives for creative expression. We can keep looking for those explicit connections between creativity and learning gains that many of us suspect exist. Most of all, we can keep the conversation with legislators, policymakers, and others in power going until we can convince them that art and the process of creative expression can do much to effect social change.

*Patricia Mew is the associate coordinator of the System for Adult Basic Education Support, West, the president of Western Massachusetts Social Action Theater Group, and a writer of Massachusetts ABE Art Curriculum Frameworks.*

Illustration courtesy of the *Mother Tongue* project.

# Promoting Creativity in ABE

*By Patricia Mew*

# Creative Teaching Changes Relationships

by Silja Kallenbach

What could happen to our teaching and learning, to the classroom environment, to relationships between teachers and students if we had a different understanding of what it means to be intelligent? How would we act differently if we believed that intelligence reflects the many talents people have not just “school smarts.” What if we were to find out that there are many kinds of intelligences that manifest themselves in different combinations in real-life activities such as gardening or teaching or fixing cars? In 1983, Dr. Howard

## THE EIGHT INTELLIGENCES

Linguistic  
Logical-mathematical  
Spatial  
Musical  
Bodily-kinesthetic  
Naturalist  
Interpersonal  
Intrapersonal

Gardner developed a theory that suggests that all humans have at least eight intelligences. It defines intelligence as the ability to solve problems or make things that are valued in a particular culture or community (see side box). Multiple intelligences (MI) theory is a radical departure from the way we have traditionally viewed intelligence because it claims that there are more than one or two ways to be intelligent. It challenges teachers to find ways to help students use their talents to meet learning objectives.

In 1996, the Adult Multiple Intelligences (AMI) Study sponsored by the National Center for the Study of Adult Learning and Literacy took on this challenge. Nine ABE, GED,

and ESOL teachers, one career counselor and two co-directors of the study began to explore how MI theory could be applied in their practice.

Most of the AMI teachers began by helping their students reflect on their intelligence strengths, for example through surveys and journaling. They complemented the MI reflections with lessons they developed that typically gave students many options for how to process information and demonstrate understanding. In other cases, the teachers developed multidimensional learning projects that allowed students to use all their senses.

There was great anticipation that classroom applications of MI theory could create dramatic change in student learning. Indeed, the AMI teachers’ creativity paid off. In each case, we have evidence that they were memorable experiences through which the students felt they learned. Study participants reported improvements in student attendance, retention rates, reading comprehension, and overall academic progress.

But learning impacts weren’t the only things influenced by introducing MI theory into the classroom. The act of teaching and learning in different ways significantly altered the teacher-student power balance. The teachers’ MI practices reduced teacher directedness and increased student initiative and control over how students process and demonstrate their learning. When teachers gave students choices, they effectively gave some control to students and respected their individual ways of learning and knowing. One practitioner found that, as students began to express preferences through choice-based activities, they also became more assertive in other ways, shifting the balance of power in the classroom somewhat. She wrote,

*My experience over the past few years had shown me that these students were reluctant to share their preferences with me. I had almost given up hope of ever being able to learn their preferences and had decided that this behavior was related to learners with limited English. [After putting MI theory into practice,] the students appeared to have reached a benchmark or milestone. . . More students made choices. And those choices reflected both what the students liked and did not like about the activities I suggested.*

Likewise, an adult secondary level teacher reported,

*A change in the teacher-student relationship in the classroom rapidly became apparent. The combination of assignments based on multiple intelligences with the strategy of allowing students to choose their own assignments was the best I have yet found for sharing power while giving students a firm structure within which to work.*

Many teachers were surprised by this turn of events. Lezlie was one of them. She commented, “My class became more interactive and student-directed as I experimented with MI theory. Before this research project, I did most of the leading and dictated the order of the activities.”

Sharing power with students was an unanticipated outcome of the creative ways in which AMI teachers changed their teaching. The teachers had to resist the urge to provide all answers and solutions while creating enough structure for learning. Students had to look more to themselves and each other for ideas and direction. Teachers and students had to renegotiate their roles.

Working with MI theory as teacher researchers also compelled the AMI teachers to clarify their own strengths and weaknesses, and how these were reflected in their teaching. It pushed them to develop or try out new teaching approaches, to become even more creative and reflective teachers than they had been before. Martha Jean said, “I feel that both my understanding and my practice have been transformed.”

To learn more about the AMI study visit <[pzweb.harvard.edu/ami](http://pzweb.harvard.edu/ami)>.

Silja Kallenbach is the coordinator of The New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.



International Women's Tribune Centre (IWTC)

## What is creativity? by Angela Orlando

Besides being the editor of this paper, I’m also a potter. But after about eight years of making things with clay and even selling some of my work, I still would never say, “I’m an artist.” It’s hard enough for me to say I’m a potter. I have this image in my head of artists—what they look like, how they dress, how they act, what they talk about—and these artists, these creative people, have lives that look quite different from mine. Personally, I never felt that I fit the image of the “creative person” I had in my mind.

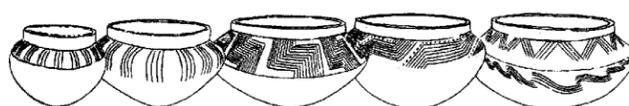
Recently, though, I began to rethink this. I felt that by denying or not seeing my own creative energy I was doing myself a disservice. It felt like by deciding I wasn’t creative I was keeping part of myself inactive, or worse, held captive. It’s been hard for me to begin to acknowledge the kind of creativity I bring to making pots. It’s even harder to see where my creativity lives in activities that aren’t “artistic.” Yet, I have begun to feel more myself, more free, and more open to others’ creativity as I re-envision what being creative means to me and include myself in that image.

I believe that it’s a personal thing, this process of defining creativity. No one person can really capture it for anyone else. So, instead of trying, I thought it a better idea to let readers do that for themselves. Hopefully the questions to the right will provide a starting point for such exploration.

### Questions for Exploration

1. What is your immediate reaction when you hear the word *creativity*?
2. How would you describe a creative person? What do they do? What do they look like? What do they talk about? How accurate do you think this image really is?
3. Have you ever had a new idea, a unique way to do something? Found a way to tell a story a different way? Put things together that didn’t “belong” together, but it worked? How did you name what you were doing?
4. Would you call yourself “creative”? Why or why not?
5. Are creative and artistic the same? If not, what’s the difference?
6. What do you think people mean by “creative thinking” or “creative problem-solving”?
7. What other activities or behaviors could be considered creative?

Angela Orlando is the editor of *The Change Agent* and a potter.



# Mother Tongue

A reflection

by Glenn Yarnell

The best moments in teaching are those times when something unexpected happens that opens doors to new projects and ideas. This happened to learners from four classes at the HALO Center during a recent visit to the Canal Gallery in Holyoke, Massachusetts. We were at the gallery to see a photography exhibit of Holyoke's architecture. Learners found it interesting, but no "WOW!" When leaving, we passed through an alcove in which hung a large number of rectangular paintings, identical in size, but clearly done by a number of artists. This wall got the "WOW" of the day. It was the *Mother Tongue* exhibit.

We discovered that *Mother Tongue* is an ongoing interactive community visual dialogue. It began in 1991 between two artists in Holyoke and has since grown to be a national project including more than 128 artists, students, and community members who have created over 300 works, in response to each other in dialogue. The artwork takes the form of 1'x4' horizontal panels ranging from traditional paintings, to multimedia assemblage and low relief sculptures. The exhibition is dynamic, changing its arrangement between, and sometimes during shows, reflecting the fluid nature of the visual conversation.

## The Process

When Mary Bernstein, founder of *Mother Tongue*, heard the impact the exhibit had on us, she invited us back to the gallery to see a larger segment of the exhibit and to discuss how we could enter into the dialogue. The panels in *Mother Tongue* do not exist as isolated creations, but are responses to each other. She encouraged the learners to find panels that spoke to them and to talk about why. Our reactions were extremely varied. Some were drawn to the color and shape in the panel, others responded to the theme or topic.

For example, one existing panel was a series of three yin/yang symbols. The first symbol was whole and complete, the second began to break apart slightly. It was still a tight circle, but the black and the white had begun to rotate. In the third symbol, the black and white looked as though they were in motion. If the first symbol weren't there, you wouldn't recognize the third as the yin/yang. A student used this idea to make three circles on a black and white background. The first circle was dominantly red, the second dominantly blue, and the third a swirl of those two colors. He called his piece "Yesterday, Today, and Tomorrow" and said that it represented the way the races were separate, but that he hoped that one day the hurt would stop and people would be together.

Mary handed out 1-foot by 4-foot rectangles of paper. This is the one "rule" in *Mother Tongue*. The artist can use any media he or she chooses, so long as it can be contained in a 1-foot by 4-foot horizontal rectangle. Paint, ink, collage, wood, wax, stone, and string are just some of the things used in previous panels. We were encouraged to sketch ideas, to write down lists of materials that we might need—in essence, we were creating an artistic outline.

It was during this time that I was pushed from my comfortable role as facilitator and into the role of participant. I have no training in art. The last art class I took was in high school, and I got a "C." In this project, my plan had been to leave the art to Mary, help direct traffic at the studio, and to engage in art-related writing and research in the classroom. But while I was circulating and talking, I was asked what I was going to do my panel about. At first I was noncommittal, kind of brushed past the question. Then my own words came back on me. In class, when I assign a journal topic, I write on it. If my students are struggling through a math puzzle, I work it with them. When I'm asked how come I'm doing that by a newer student, I'll say that I won't ask them to do what I won't do myself. One of my ABE students reminded me of that, very loudly, in the middle of the studio. Mary immediately chimed in, telling me there were plenty of materials for me to make one, too. Suddenly, I had many of the same fears I was telling the learners NOT to worry about. What would I paint? I don't know HOW to paint! What if it didn't look good? But I also realized that I needed to push myself the way that they were doing. I couldn't NOT participate in this just because it was something with which I wasn't comfortable.

The following week, we returned to the Canal Gallery and built the panels. It was during this time that some new personalities began emerging. A couple of guys that tended not to participate much in class made sure that others were doing OK with their construction. And some of the students that were usually very talkative were showing a focus I had rarely seen. At the end of the too-brief session, a great deal of progress was made, but there was still work to be done. We brought the panels back to HALO and my classroom was turned into a studio.

This was a fascinating session. Learners from four different classes (Beginning Literacy, ABE, Pre-GED, and GED) were participating in the project. At first, everyone stuck with his or her own group. But it didn't take long until talking started. Initial conversation was born of necessity. Somebody had the yellow that someone else needed. Learners were soon talking about the meaning of their paintings, why they used certain colors, and offered support to each other. When one student lamented that he couldn't draw, another said, "Don't worry about it, just do it. It's all good."

## The Result

On May 8, 2002 the work of 19 HALO learners opened at the Canal Gallery in Holyoke. In attendance were the other students from the Center, family, friends, and representatives from other adult education providers in the city.

I thought that was the end of the project. But I was wrong. The HALO Center is going to be a permanent satellite site for the *Mother Tongue* project. Student work, plus other panels from the collection, will be on display at the Center. Students who did not participate in this first round have asked to make panels.

Our accidental discovery during a one-time trip to look at some architecture photographs has become an involved, evolving, and vibrant part of the Center and the curriculum.

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***"Being part of this thing motivates me to do more in class."***

- A HALO Student/Artist

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***"This helped because if you are stressed out about something you can't really deal with it at school and you can't focus on the GED. The panel helped get at the problem and made it easier to concentrate."***

- A HALO Student/Artist

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***"It felt good to be part of a group."***

- A HALO Student/Artist

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# The Opening

*The HALO Center, Holyoke, MA*

by Michele Sedor

Approximately 40 people including students, community members, artists and people from the adult education field came to see the artwork and hear the stories behind the panels of the *Mother Tongue* exhibit. Artwork from HALO students/artists hung beside, and often was indistinguishable from, that of established artists who have taken part in the project. Below are descriptions of what motivated some of the students/artists and the meanings behind their works.

Marlena Bassett's friend had recently been raped and Marlena found creating a panel was a powerful way to deal with how they were both feeling. Her friend helped her with the panel, writing some of the words and adding artwork. The panel will be donated to the college where the rape occurred. Marlena was amazed that HALO encouraged her to do this work.

*Life and Death* is the title of a panel created by Anjysan Reyes depicting a light side and a dark side. The light half represents how wonderful human life and nature are when we take care of ourselves and the environment. The dark half represents the opposite. He said the panel allowed him to make a statement about the world that expresses how he really feels.

Geraldo Torres was inspired to show how he felt about 9/11 by a panel done by another artist that featured doors that actually opened. Under each door in his work, Geraldo had a quote about or a picture from the events of that day. He said that he wanted to do this project because it was a new experience. It helped him, particularly in math, since he had to work with measurements, especially so that the doors worked on the panel. He, too, found that creating the panel helped with sharing his emotions and thoughts with others.

"The colors helped me get creative," is how Joel Banilla describes the process of creating his panel, *Days and Night*. Of his work he says, "I live day by day and at night I pray to God I wake up the next day." Working on the panel helped him to see that he could obtain results by continuing to work on something over a period of time. He found that looking at the work of the other students/artists inspired him and he was amazed that he got so far and did so much.

These stories and others were told at the opening. Some people had used artwork as inspiration, as was the original intent of the *Mother Tongue* project. Others had used the opportunity to express something they felt compelled to share. Some panels were created in celebration, some as a way of healing, while others were simply created to bring more beauty and art into the world. In a *Mother Tongue* exhibit there is room for all this and more.

Michele Sedor has worked in the field of adult education for 15 years. She currently works at the System for Adult Basic Education Support in Western, MA.



## Words on the sun panel

To make this well, bring me every hand  
Black, with their black hands.  
White, with their white hands.  
A wall that will extend  
from the beach to the mountain  
there... spread across the horizon.  
For the heart of a friend  
open the wall  
for poison and dagger. Close the wall;  
For myrtle and mint  
Open the wall  
For the serpent's teeth  
Close the wall, for the  
heart of a friend... for the  
nightingale in the flower... we  
will raise this wall by joining all  
of our hands, black with their  
black hands, white with their  
white hands. A wall that will  
extend from the beach to the  
mountain, from the mountain to  
the beach then... spread across  
the horizon.



To learn more about the *Mother Tongue* Project and to view an on-line exhibit of the 300+ works that have been created over the past 11 years, go to <[ddc.hampshire.edu/mothertongue](http://ddc.hampshire.edu/mothertongue)>.

# Everyday People

by Trudy Moss

“What does *folklore* mean to you?” I recently asked a group of colleagues. “What images does the word bring to mind?” “Fairy tales,” someone said. “An old man playing the banjo on the porch of a mountain cabin,” offered another. “A quilt passed down from mother to daughter.”

No one mentioned rural youths spray-painting graffiti on a railroad trestle. Or makeshift memorials to those who died in the World Trade Center attack. Is a family’s customary Sunday dinner too ordinary to consider?

## Seeing Ourselves

Examining our lives in the context of folklore—how our worldviews and belief systems are shaped—invites us to see ourselves as cultural beings. A closer look at the “insider/outsider” patterns around us can reveal how we construct our identities, as well as how we negotiate the boundaries of identity to create community. This awareness is especially important for educators. As teachers, we need to be mindful of how we dominate in terms of what we emphasize, de-emphasize, or ignore in the classroom. We must also be aware of the ways in which we evaluate educational materials, as well as student performance and participation, on the basis of our own cultural criteria.

Everyday classroom instruction offers numerous opportunities for incorporating folklore into the curriculum. As an elementary school media specialist, I developed an interdisciplinary thematic unit on tradition. The study of fractions was the impetus for a lesson that began with quilting but soon branched to other examples of material culture. We learned about symmetry from various cultural perspectives and explored its presence or absence in such traditional forms as quilts, architecture, dance, gardens, and graveyards.

A yearly poetry unit became an examination of folk poetry, such as haiku, rap, Native American chants, and children’s playground games. Students researched the ways these traditional forms of poetry expressed the worldviews of the groups from which they originated and served as agents of enculturation for their members.

## Community Wisdom

Proponents of relational education emphasize that students’ real lives are an essential component of the curriculum. We are often unaware of life-changing experiences our students or classmates have had. As an introduction to the concept of oral history, having students interview one another can be an especially meaningful experience. All around us there are people who have experienced the death of a family member, seen the President, saved an animal’s life, or fled a war-ravaged homeland. Even if the narratives are less extraordinary, they bring home the fact that each of our lives is made up of stories and other forms of traditional expression. On a practical level, oral history projects help students develop the “reporter” skills of research, ques-

tioning, interpretation, transcription, and presentation.

More deeply, learning about history from a personal narrative challenges the notion that history is something that happens to others and offers a cultural perspective on events that is often missing in textbooks. Oral history projects can result in something as simple as a family member’s biography or in a product that is quite complex—for example, a collection of “testimonies” about a significant historical event, such as a community bicentennial or a record-breaking flood.

Michael Umphrey, leader of the Montana Heritage Project,<sup>1</sup> has written, “As [students] become more aware of local crises and dilemmas, their investigations can furnish them with ideas about what choices are possible.

They find evidence of the consequences of various ways of thinking and acting. They become more likely to make intelligent choices.”

Umphrey and his colleagues have seen amazing transformations among some of the students who have worked on the project. Their work is meaningful, the products they create are vital and appreciated, and the knowledge they gain is permanent.

The study of folklore is the study of human culture, with universal themes of celebration, tradition, creation, aesthetic appreciation, wisdom, and community. Exploring folklore invites each of us to reexamine our own lives, to search for meaning in the seemingly trivial and extraneous details and patterns that make up our existence. Such reflection can help dispel stereotypes and help us to discover our commonalities and shared experience. Bringing folklore into the classroom can strengthen the connection between the educational experience within school walls and the one outside.

<sup>1</sup> The Montana Heritage Project links schools around the state in studying and documenting the everyday life of their communities.

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Launched in September 2001, *teachingtolerance.org* offers an online digest of tolerance-related news, monthly lesson plans, interactive classroom activities, an educator forum, downloadable back issues of *Teaching Tolerance* magazine and much, much more. You may send a fax request to the attention of Orders Department at (334) 956-8486.

## The Seasonal Round: Finding Our Own Folklore First

By Paddy Bowman

By marking their own special days and traditions on a circular calendar, students can identify many examples of folklore that are important to them and their families, as well as their classmates, schools, communities.

### Directions for Teachers

Print a Seasonal Round Worksheet from “Louisiana Voices” (<[www.crt.state.la.us/arts/folklife/edu\\_unit9w\\_seas\\_round\\_blan.html](http://www.crt.state.la.us/arts/folklife/edu_unit9w_seas_round_blan.html)>), then copy blanks for each student. Fill in your own worksheet using colored pencils to mark seasons and days important to you. Study your calendar and record patterns by comparing such elements as private and shared days of remembrance or secular and sacred celebrations. Consider what to tell students about how you would mark a special occasion with ritual, food, customs, music, dance, special clothing, words, or stories.

### Procedure

- ❶ Show students your personal round and share a seasonal story or tradition important to you.
- ❷ Hand out blank seasonal rounds and colored pencils and ask students to fill in their own calendars. Give them about 10 minutes and tell them they may draw pictures on their worksheets if they wish. (Alternatively, use the handout as a take-home activity to be completed with family members.) When they finish, ask them to study their seasonal rounds and find something that surprises them.

- ❸ Ask students to pair and share their seasonal rounds, giving students time to tell about their year to a partner. The partner should ask at least one question, which the student should write down. After 5 minutes, make sure students switch so everyone has a chance to share.
- ❹ Begin a discussion of this activity by asking a pair to share their calendars and observations. What surprised each of them about their own calendars? Their partner’s calendar? What questions did they ask their partners? What more would they ask?
- ❺ After everyone shares, students can choose to do the following analysis:
  - Graph topics such as celebrations that are sacred, secular or both; ones that involve foods; or ones that reflect gender or cultural differences.
  - Write a paragraph comparing and contrasting a public and a private occasion.
  - Reach consensus on dates and celebrations to include on a large collaborative class seasonal round and decorate the calendar to hang in the classroom. Make seasonal round collages using cardboard cake rounds as a base.
  - Produce a seasonal round skit incorporating something from each student’s calendar.

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# Breaking Barriers with Humor

by Silja Kallenbach

*Silja Kallenbach interviewed Aliza Ansell, adult educator and founder/director of the Wellness Company, to find out why humor is an important kind of creative expression. Aliza has over 20 years of experience in business, events planning, wellness training, program development, and theater. She is a trail runner, student of Yoga, and loves to laugh.*

## Why are laughter and humor important in life and learning?

Humor helps us access the creativity that lives inside us. It helps us learn differently and be better problem solvers. It can dissolve tension between groups, for example in the classroom. Laughter and playfulness build bonds between people. People begin to see each other in a different light, which serves to break down barriers like class, race, and level of education that separate them.

Humor can also reduce stress. Often when we think of stress reduction, we think of more serious modalities like breathing and yoga, and one thing that gets lost a lot is humor.

## In Adult Basic Education we typically have to cover a lot of material in a short time period. How can a teacher justify spending time on goofy activities?

As adult educators we learn that people learn in many different ways. Humor is yet another modality. You open up parts of the brain. Humor and different kinds of relaxation techniques can help us to get out of our own way in order to access the deeper wealth within us. Often when you relax, creative ideas start flying. Learning basic skills and getting ready to go into the workforce can be stressful. These kinds of activities allow students to take a break from that stress. You become free of tension and can begin to think more clearly.

## What activities and approaches have you used to a good effect in your ABE class? How have your students reacted?

As a teacher at Vermont Adult Learning, I'm incorporating humor and relaxation activities into my teaching. After every hour of class, we get up and either do improvisation or stretching, yoga and breathing. We've done the ball toss and made shapes like the alphabet with our bodies. I always start with the ball toss because it breaks the ice. (See the description on this page.) If there are people who have physical handicaps, I try to modify the activity or give them the option of sitting out.

The students think it has always been part of the curriculum. There is the occasional person that cannot get into it at all, but generally the students love it. They ask for it. They get to laugh and be in their bodies in another way. They digest information in a less linear way. I also ask them to step into

the leadership roles. That way they can also pass what they've learned on to others.

## If you had to pick one activity that always works and gets the desired results, what would it be?

I would choose the problem-solving activity when people are working on a problem of their own choosing. (See the description below.) When something incongruous is juxtaposed with a problem people start thinking differently. It helps them to begin thinking outside of the box. I always do this as a group activity. Stay away from the big problems; they freeze people's creativity because they're so daunting. I've been doing the problem-solving activity with cancer patients. They have great fun.

## What advice do you have for using humor for those of us who can never remember the punch line of a joke, and for whom acting is not in our comfort zone?

I never bill myself as a comedian. I know comedy improvisation. It's not about remembering the punch line. It's about creating your own punch line. Teachers underestimate how much their students would devour comic relief and relaxation because they themselves feel uncomfortable. They fear that people won't be able to loosen up. If I can win over Vietnam vets and angry homeless people, you can do these activities with anyone successfully. Within ten minutes the energy shifts. People relax and get into it. Over and over again, people thank me. They say things like, "I forgot my worries" or "I was a kid again the first time in 20 years."

## What other advice do you have for adult basic educators for infusing humor into instruction?

At very low levels of English literacy some of these techniques are difficult to do, but other than that, just do it. Do anything you can to help people relax so they can absorb more and be more comfortable. Start with simple activities like the ball throw that build community and trust in the group. You need to create a safe environment.

*Silja Kallenbach is the coordinator of the New England Literacy Resource Center at World Education in Boston, MA.*

## Humor Activities for the Classroom

### PROBLEM-SOLVING ACTIVITY

The participants are divided into small groups of three-to-five people. The facilitator asks the participants to suggest any problems and issues in daily life that are not big daunting problems like poverty or AIDS. Examples of problems people have suggested before are parents dealing with their teenage children, cell phones, traffic jams, and litter. The facilitator writes down the problems as people state them and asks for clarification as necessary. Next, s/he asks people to come up with names of various jobs or occupations, especially less common ones like a dog walker or circus performer. The facilitator then picks unusual combinations from the two lists. For example, traffic jams and dog walkers or cell phones and circus performers. Each group is given the task of developing a skit that shows how they will solve the given problem in the character and from the perspective of the assigned person (e.g., dog walker).

### BALL THROW

The participants are divided into small groups of five-to-eight people. They stand in a circle. The facilitator asks people, for example, to name things that are green or their favorite foods or movies or famous women as they throw the ball to another other. The goal is to keep the ball in the air, and for people to think quickly on their feet. Each category gets two-to-three minutes and then the facilitator calls out the next one.

### GROUP SCULPTURE

The participants are divided into small groups of five-to-eight people. Their task is to do a body sculpture of a machine and demonstrate it to others without using words. The groups guess what each other's machines are. Depending on people's background knowledge, the theme for the body sculpture could be a famous painting.

### TWO SIDES OF THE BRAIN

Two people volunteer. One person decides on a motion and acts it out, for example combing her hair or tying her shoelaces. The second person asks, "What are you doing?" Person 1 replies with something that contradicts the motions she is doing. Person 1 changes her motion and person 2 asks the same question to which person 1 replies with something contradictory. For example, if person 1 is combing her hair, she might reply that she is playing tennis.

# “I Am” The Voice of Graffiti

by Salomon Zavala and Richard Mora



Ducer, a street graffiti wall by Duce

On a summer night, a dark clad figure runs across the lanes of a Los Angeles freeway, dodging fast-moving vehicles. He maneuvers his body around barbed wire and climbs a center pole up onto an overpass freeway sign. As he tries to gather his balance, he opens his backpack and pulls out a spray-paint can. While hanging for life with one hand, he diligently outlines with the other the letters of his ‘tag’ (a distinct name that each graffiti writer chooses to use). When semi-trucks and other large vehicles rumble below, the sign trembles causing him to slip and neatly fall onto the freeway—a situation that almost surely means death. This shadowy figure is a graffiti writer and his experience is shared by many youth in urban settings throughout the United States.

Since the beginning of aerosol graffiti in the late seventies in New York City, when graffiti writers would risk being electrocuted and killed just to put up their tag on city subways, many writers continue to risk their lives to write their names. What drives graffiti writers to endanger their lives simply to put up their tags or pieces, intricate letter patterns with complex color schemes and backgrounds? As Wel, a Los Angeles graffiti writer puts it, “It’s me showing and yelling to the world my name and my crew’s... I exist... I am.”

In Los Angeles, some youth—mainly Latinos—consider graffiti a form of art through which they can express themselves and demonstrate their artistic talents to the world. Swan, a writer from L.A.’s infamous UTI (Using The Imagination) crew (a group of artists who take on an acronym and work together) states, “In poor urban neighborhoods youngsters want an identity. They want to know they exist in society... so they pick up a marker or a spray can and write their name. I was here. That’s me.” In impoverished communities, youth do not have much, if any, access to art programs. Nor can they afford to attend art schools, so they turn to graffiti as a way to develop and practice their artwork. Besides being a form of self-expression, graffiti can also be therapeutic for young people who must contend with the stress of urban poverty. “It’s like therapy... I may be angry one day and just go out and paint and get it all out. It’s very relaxing when I’m out there painting... I forget about all my problems. I forget that I am even part of this world,” says Duce, a graffiti artist and muralist from South Central Los Angeles.

On the streets of Los Angeles, the graffiti subculture also serves as an alternative to street gangs. “When you are in your early teens, you are really impressionable. When you are at that age you are asking yourself, ‘Where do I belong?’ You have lots of gangs in L.A. and a lot of things to deal with... you look at how violent gangs are and then you look at how easy it is to do graffiti... you just come up with a name and write,” says Swan.

The manner in which graffiti writers settle disputes and problems among themselves is indicative of the difference between the world of graf (graffiti) and the gang world. Whereas gangs in L.A. seek to resolve their problems by fighting or shooting at one another, graf writers take their squabbles to the walls in what is known as a “battle.” A battle is an artistic competition, usually between two individuals or two crews. The winner is determined by a neutral judge, who critiques the quality of the two parties’ works based on creativity, style, and innovation. During one of L.A.’s classic battles, which took place in 1989 between Hex and Slick, a message that captures the essence of the graf world was incorporated into a piece: “Why can’t all wars be settled on a wall?”

In the graffiti world, writers put up their names in as many visible places as possible to be seen and recognized by others, especially graf writers. Gin, a vet-

eran graf writer from TNT (The Dynamite Team) crew, states: “Doing graffiti is something that no one can take from me. It’s like my little world where I can be famous.” Indeed this subculture functions as a world in which writers can become “known” based on both the quantity and quality of their artwork. “You have to stand out from the others, so I do my name on riskier spots like bridges and I also do my name bigger than the other writers,” says Duce.

Graffiti has enabled many urban youth to interact and build lifelong friendships with other writers of different ethnic, racial, and socioeconomic backgrounds, from suburbia to other cities. For many Los Angeles graf writers, the first people of different ethnic and economic backgrounds that they come in contact with are writers from crews in other areas. One of the most appealing and unique characteristics of this art form is that anyone from anywhere can become a respected graf writer. Your reputation in the graffiti world is based solely on your artistic skills, and not on any privileges that may come with your class, race, or gender.

Although graffiti writers start off by “tagging,” through practice, experience, and advice from older members in their crew(s), most writers evolve into great artists. As such, they go on to paint elaborate “pieces,” most painted illegally under the cover of night. They can be seen throughout the city on freeway walls, commercial buildings, and on the concrete banks of the Los Angeles River. Since these works are not commissioned, most are removed soon after. However, some pieces remain undisturbed for months, or even years, because their aesthetic quality is appreciated as much by commuters and graffiti removal squads as it is by other graf artists.

By utilizing their artistic skills to benefit their neighborhoods, graffiti artists are able to gain recognition not only from the graffiti world, but also from their own communities.

Even though some graffiti writers become accepted as “legitimate” artists, having their artwork exhibited at museums and art shows, most are not. As a result, some feel that their work is being disregarded. Many graffiti writers are trying to combat the negative stigma attached to their work, which they consider to be the main reason why their work is neglected in the mainstream art world. One way graf artists are doing this is by exhibiting their artwork to the world via the World Wide Web. The Internet allows them to display not only pictures of current pieces, but also pictures of pieces that may have been already removed or painted over.

Barbed wire has not prevented graf writers from painting and neither will the harsher laws and stricter penalties against “graffiti vandals” that are being implemented in cities throughout the country. Graffiti is very meaningful to its practitioners. As a graf artist once wrote on his piece, “It’s a cold world out there, and graffiti is my blanket.” We need to look at graf artists in relation to their social context. Unable to find more suitable ways to develop their skills as well as alternative venues where they can showcase their artwork, graf artists will continue to risk their lives in order to paint their names on the large overhead freeway signs known appropriately to graf artists as “the heavens.”

Salomon Zavala, a member of the UTI crew and a senior at Amherst College, is completing a documentary on graf entitled, *I Am: The Complete History of Los Angeles Graffiti*. Richard Mora, who is from Northeast Los Angeles, is currently a graduate student at Harvard University.

Excerpted with permission from *DRCLAS NEWS*, Harvard University, Winter 2001 Newsletter. © 2001 by the President and Fellows of Harvard College.

## READING ACTIVITY

Before Reading:

- 1 Look at the photo on top of the page. What do you think it is? Have you even seen anything like this? If so, where? Did you like it?
- 2 Do you know what “graffiti” is? Do you think it is a form of art?

After Reading:

- 1 What is the difference between a gang and a crew?
- 2 Did reading this article change your mind about the value of graffiti as art?
- 3 What do you think the crew meant who wrote the graffiti message, “Why can’t all wars be settled on a wall?” Do you agree or disagree with them? Why?
- 4 If you could create a piece of graffiti to go in a public place in your neighborhood, what would it be?
- 5 Get together a crew to plan a piece of graffiti and make it on paper for your classroom. Invite staff and other learners to see it and discuss it with you.

# The Beauty of Words

by Alex Risley Schroeder

“What would it be like if we asked learners why their education was important to them and then asked calligraphic artists to render those words visually?” The idea was pure inspiration. Seeking a creative and powerful way to celebrate International Literacy Day 1997, the Adult Basic Education Alliance of Western Massachusetts invited calligraphers to render the words of adult learners as visual calligraphic art.

Learners from several Western Massachusetts ABE programs were asked to write about why their education was important to them. Seven local calligraphers then chose compelling phrases from essays written by nineteen learners and interpreted them. The resulting pieces were initially exhibited in *Celebrating Literacy, The Beauty of Words* at the Art Gallery at Holyoke Community College and subsequently at four ABE programs and at the annual Massachusetts Adult Basic Education conference, as well as other venues.

Just as the learners presented diverse reasons for the importance of their education, so too were the visual representations diverse. The collection of pieces was a rich spectrum ranging from words painstakingly rendered in Gothic lettering, to a starburst exploding amongst words, to a line evolving into text to illustrate the difficulty some have reading. The response to the exhibit was positive and enthusiastic. Summing up the power of the exhibit, one person said: “Extraordinary, moving and beautiful.”

I talked with Jamie Risley Hall, one of the participating calligraphers who also worked tirelessly to organize the calligraphers and to develop the

exhibit. I asked her about her experience participating in this project.

ARS: *Jamie, why did you participate in this project?*

JRH: Words are everything to a calligrapher. We have a deep reverence for words and the emotions that they convey. I remember that it was hard to choose which learners’ writing to work with. I wished that I could do all of them, or that we had 10,000 calligraphers working together on the project.

ARS: *What was your experience of visually interpreting the words of adult learners? (Jamie worked with the words of four learners, making four pieces altogether.)*

JRH: As I reflect back on the project, I remember several things quite clearly. I remember being strongly struck by how so many of us take our reading and language skills for granted in ways that adult learners cannot. I was really moved by the writers’ emotions. And I wanted to offer my empathy and my support by giving learners the opportunity to see their words and thoughts “up in lights,” so to speak. I think the exhibit made a dramatic statement and gave the people who saw the pieces a sense of the tremendous importance learners place on their education.

*Alex Risley Schroeder has been working in the ABE field for the past 15 years, most recently at the System for Adult Basic Education, West.*

The visual images below were by created by Jamie based on selected phrases from each learners’ pieces.

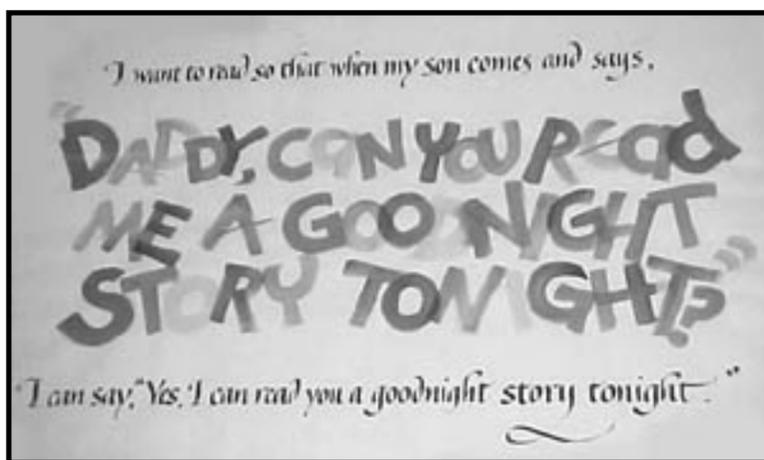
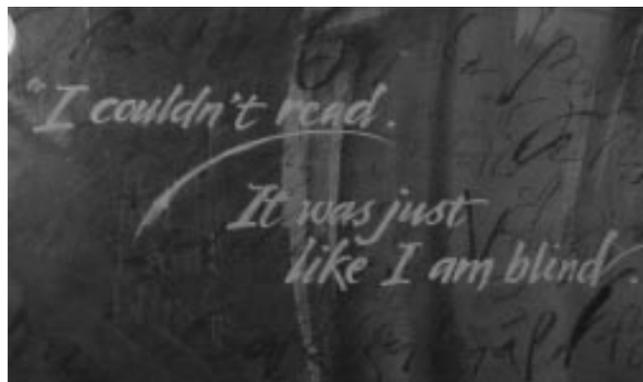
## I Can Help Myself By Yong Anderson

I am a Korean. I came to the United States in 1960. I have two sons. My older son graduated from Norwich University. He is in the USA Air Force. My younger son graduated from Boston College. He has his own business.

I thank God for helping with them when they were young. I raised them by myself. I had a language problem. My children went to school. They brought homework. They asked me “Mom, Mom, help me with the homework.” I heard that. I was so embarrassed. My blood pressure went up to maybe three hundred.

So I tried to learn English, but I didn’t know where there was an adult program—maybe in the newspaper, but *I couldn’t read. It was just like I am blind.* I was looking for a long time for an English program. Finally, my friend Anna told me about this English program. I was so glad to hear. I called the number. Someone answered the telephone. It was a very nice, kind warm voice—friendly. She said “Are you interested in the English program?” So I said “Yes.” Then she questioned me and took my application. I waited a long time—maybe three months.

Then she called me. I was so happy I couldn’t sleep. I came here. I am learning to read and write and do math. I am seventy years old. I have learned lots of things by myself, legal matters, writing and reading checks, all the mail and bills. Writing and reading are very important. I have to take care of myself. My children are far away from me. They have their own lives to live. No one helps me. I am continuing to learn until I can take care of myself.



## I Am Very Happy to Be Back by Lloyd Hamilton

I want to be back to learn to read and write better and I am back to go all the way. I am very happy to be back here. *I want to read so that when my son comes and says “Daddy, can you read me a goodnight story tonight?” I can say “Yes, I can read you a goodnight story tonight.”*

I always wanted to go back to school. I always look at people when they are reading the paper and say “I wish that was me reading the paper.” A lot of times when I go fill out an application it is very hard for me. My girlfriend, Maria, always helps me with reading. She was so happy when I told her that I signed up for class again. She is very loving to me and that makes me strong. I could not ask for more from her. She always asks me about class.

Many thanks to the Calligraphy Studio of Jamie Risley Hall for permission to reproduce these two pieces. Other work by the artist can be viewed at <[www.calligraphystudio.net](http://www.calligraphystudio.net)>.

# Book Making for Parents

by Diana Barbero and Dottie Dunford

Classes in parenting have long been an important part of the curriculum offered by the Education Department in the Suffolk County House of Correction in Boston, MA. In order to help inmates connect with their children, we decided to include a book making project as a final program activity. We also anticipated the therapeutic value of drawing, coloring and creating.

We purchased attractive papers, both for pages and covers, colored pencils, markers, stencils and other art materials. Magazines were made available for those who might want to make a collage. Since art is not normally offered in this institution, the materials themselves were an attraction that could brighten an otherwise dreary time of their lives. We made suggestions for content but each person's book was his/her own. The results were as varied as the students were.

One common initial response was "I can't draw." Others spent a few days fretting that they didn't know how to do the project. Eventually the classroom turned into an extremely interactive and cooperative workroom with people helping each other. Staff made books along with the students. We were trying out things and making mistakes just as the inmates were. The project was a great equalizer. We were no longer "the teachers"; the lines between staff and students melted as suggestions, compliments and assistance were given and received by all members of the class. In the men's class, one artistic inmate agreed to be available to help those in the class who needed more guidance and suggestions.

Everyone was required to write a draft, which we reviewed and corrected for spelling and grammatical errors. Often students had another student read it first and make suggestions or help when they got stuck. This enhanced the academic value of the project as students were engaged in the writing process and welcomed suggestions and corrections so that the final project would be "perfect."

Some chose to do ABC or Number books, but with the example of the letter or the number reflecting the child. For example, A might be for Amy (the child's name) and B is for Boo, her dog. Others used the letters in the child's name to structure the book and connected each letter to details in the child's life. Some chose fairy tale or fantasy formats or wrote the book in the form of a letter to the child. One woman used the book to acknowledge her addiction and incarceration for the first time.

One young man was painting the pictures in his book when he made an error. He was ready to throw the book away until Diana assisted him in gluing the pages together to eliminate his mistake. He was delighted with the result and we were pleased to have the opportunity for a teachable moment—persevere and find a way to correct mistakes.

The results far exceeded our hopes and expectations. Children responded eagerly to their gifts. One young teenager contacted his mother for the first time in over a year to acknowledge the book she'd made for him. A book was sent express mail for an out-of-state delivery and was actually delivered on Christmas day. Father and daughter had been estranged for years and the book, which documented and illustrated all the important events in the daughter's life, was a means of connection.

The project provided a quiet time when the fathers and mothers visualized the child and mentally prepared to connect with the child and become the parent again. Family members told the inmates how much the children liked getting the books and, in the case of younger children, having it read to them. They recognized the time and effort that went into making the book and our students welcomed the praise and thanks that were given them. They felt validated as parents, a feeling too seldom experienced.

Although we had no hard statistical data and few post-release stories, we believe that the book making project was time well spent. It provided a thoughtful environment for the inmates to consider their past parenting and to think about the needs of the children and their plans for the future. The creative aspect provided a healthy outlet, as well as a cooperative atmosphere to share, discuss and remember. The project allowed people to come forward in different ways. The one with the best pictures or the most admired book was not necessarily the person who normally excelled in class.

Other inmates have heard about the books and we have had many more requests for class than had previously been the case. It was and is our hope that the project might be a first step toward permanent personal change and improvement in parenting.

*Diana Barbero and Dottie Dunford work in the Education Department in the Suffolk County House of Correction in Boston, MA*

## Making a Difference Through Film

by Lourdes Torres

When Professor Diana Satin at the Jamaica Plain Community Center's Adult Learning Program asked the class to choose a topic that we wanted to study, the majority voted for AIDS. Later Diana told us that Cathy Coleman, who was at the SABES Central Regional Support Center, had offered to help the class make a film about AIDS. As we excitedly discussed this, we realized the resources we had within the class: one person was a film director, another was a filmmaker, and another worked in a clinic and had a coworker who knew about AIDS.

The enthusiasm to make the film grew as we started getting more informed about AIDS. We had thought we knew a lot, but we found there was so much more to learn. We realized that by doing the film we could help other people learn, too. We wanted the film to be easier to understand and clearer than other films on AIDS that we had seen.

We learned about filmmaking and how to use the camera from Cathy, who was very generous with her knowledge. We helped each other, and began to feel more secure about what we were doing. We learned how to work in a group—to come to agreement on what we were going to do and how we were going to do it. Even though we didn't know how to act we had a positive attitude because the most important thing to us was to share all the information we had.

I was amazed at how much each of my friends had to contribute. I saw how important it was to be open to the qualities every person brought to the project. Each person gave his or her best without question. By the end of the project we appreciated each other more.

Making the film that was also powerful for me because I came to understand that you can be destroyed by the disease if you don't have real information about how to protect yourself and those you love. We were giving people what they needed to stay alive and healthy. Our film made a difference in our community.

Sharing our knowledge through the film and having the opportunity to hear the compliments from people who saw the film was very rewarding for all of us. I was parking my car and the parking attendant said "Oh, Lourdes, I saw you on the cable TV—what a great film. That was nice to get all that information!" I felt very proud of what we all had accomplished, and I realized you can do something important to help others if you really want to with all your heart.

*Lourdes Torres is from Honduras, and has been a community worker for many years.*

You can see this film at [www.worlded.org/us/health/lincs/video/smgoon56norm.ram](http://www.worlded.org/us/health/lincs/video/smgoon56norm.ram)

# 365/24/7: Moms on Duty!

A Radio Program for International Women's Day

by Mev Miller

## Introduction

In the Twin Cities (Minneapolis and St. Paul) of Minnesota, we have a unique resource—a community radio station, KFAI Fresh Air Radio. Since 1989, KFAI has sponsored special 24-hour live programming in honor of International Women's Day, March 8. This year, the students in the Family Learning Program of South St. Paul decided to take part as a class project.

## The Process—Building a Radio Show

After talking and writing about what International Women's Day meant to them in the year 2002, the class decided that the theme should be the struggles and stress of being a mother and a woman. They then chose to use a “talk show” format and began planning the show.

Women volunteered to do different things. Melanie agreed to write the description of our learning program to read on the show. Beatrice said she would like to ask the questions. Debbie likes to talk and is excited about the format. She would talk a lot and help keep the conversation moving. Letty agreed to write a final summary and read it at the end of the show. Some women said they would feel more comfortable if they could write down their ideas ahead of time.

But many echoed Ana's feelings when she wrote: *When I first heard about the radio show I thought, “Uffff!! Me in the radio? No thank you. About what, I will talk? My voice is not a radio voice, and many things similar.” The principle was my bad English pronunciation, but later I thought that if you don't take a risk you don't win anything, and I want to win a new experience in my life.*

The class brainstormed questions they could talk about on the show. They came up with a long list. These are some examples:

- Why do women always have all the responsibility? The kids always run to mommy instead of dad. Why do they want everything from the mom?
- What do you do if you feel tired all the time?
- What has it been like to try and get an education while raising kids? What does an education mean to you?
- What do you do when you're suddenly homeless and you have a new infant? What do you do when you get depressed?

After more discussion, learners decided to name the show, *365/24/7: Moms on duty with NO pay*. The class practiced 2 or 3 times for the show. This part was hard. As the students put it: “We would pretend we were on the air and no one would talk. Then, when we stopped practicing, we had a lot to say about being mothers! Sometimes we felt like we were practicing too much. But each practice taught us something about each other. Every time we practiced we changed our plans for what we would do. We even made changes on March 7, the day we had to tape the show!”

The taping itself went fast and learners found they all had lots to say. Then they just had to wait until the next day to hear how they'd sound on the air. It was very exciting.

## Reflections from Students

I had always imagined how it was to be on the radio. When I was told about the radio show I felt very excited. After a few days, I started to feel scared and undecided. I was afraid to send a different message than what I was really feeling because I am not too good at expressing my feelings, but I finally decided to go. When I was there I was excited, but nervous. After I listened to the program I felt confident and happy, that was the best part. We all said important and helpful things for mothers. It was a great experience for me. I am thankful for being invited to participate. – *Letty*

***It feels good when you hear your own voice on the radio.***

It feels good when you hear your own voice on the radio. You feel important to yourself and to others, and you respect yourself more. – *Ruta*

***You feel important to yourself and to others, and you respect yourself more.*** – *Ruta*

I read another mother's story. It made me feel great reading a story about someone else. It could change other people's lives. – *Melinda*

I was very nervous at first, then I calmed down and I started to enjoy myself. We all relaxed and began to talk as if we were in class. I think it helped us a lot that we could talk like that because we are all friends and we share many feelings. We did a great job as a group. – *Beatriz*

The half-hour that we had just talking about the duties and responsibilities of mothers/women have with their kids gave us an opportunity to let our voices be heard. I thought our group had wonderful stories to share about their own experiences and life struggles of raising their children alone, mentally and physically—and basically letting people out there know that they're not alone either. – *Debbie*

## Reflections from Teachers

As I watched and listened to the progress the women made as they planned the format and questions, I could not help seeing and living the empowerment that was taking place. We can talk about our lives and share with others—hope is alive and well! We are women. We are mothers. We know tomorrow will come. This experience has been very powerful and enriching. – *Liz*

Each one of these women is overcoming challenges and obstacles in their lives everyday. This experience enriched all of us! – *Evelyn*

As a radio programmer for many years, I love having the opportunity to share the experience of doing radio with other women. I have also felt the excitement, nervousness and pride as experienced by these women. I appreciated their willingness and courage to take this risk to have their voices be heard. They had some amazing and provocative insights to share. It was fun and powerful, especially as their self-confidence noticeably grew. This program was a fitting way to commemorate International Women's Day. I strongly recommend radio as a good learning experience for both learners and listeners. – *Mev*

For the complete story and pictures of “Moms on Duty” visit <[www.litwomen.org/learnwrite/RadioBook.pdf](http://www.litwomen.org/learnwrite/RadioBook.pdf)>.

Mev Miller has been doing community radio for 10 years. She is the founder of WE LEARN (Women Expanding - Literacy Education Action Resource Network). <[www.litwomen.org/welearn.html](http://www.litwomen.org/welearn.html)>.

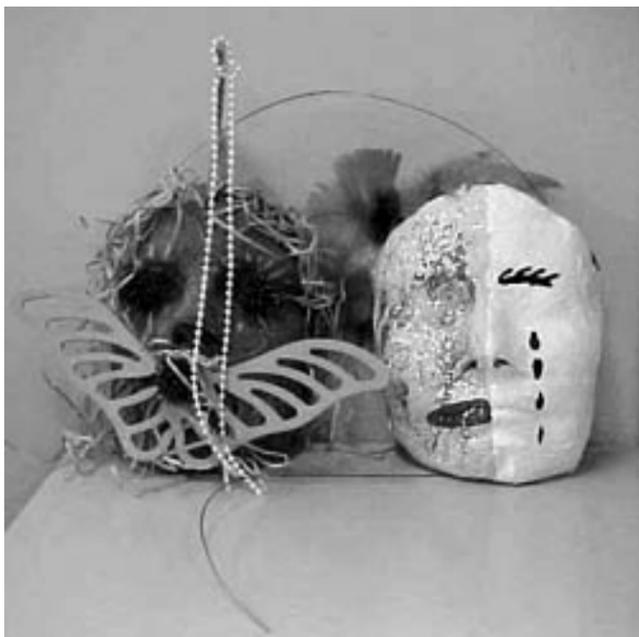
# Who Am I, Really? Making Masks in the Classroom

by Alex Risley-Schroeder and Michele Sedor

Masks are a familiar metaphor for many adult learners and a mask-making activity can open up discussion about the different masks that each of us wears in our day-to-day lives, as well as the masks that are put on us by others. In this way, social and cultural constraints that act upon adult learners can be explored through writing about masks and through the actual creation of masks.

Masks can show who we are, who we want to be, who we were; they can let us escape into fantasy, tell the truth under the cover of disguise or honor cultural, family and other traditions. Using masks in the adult education classroom can allow people to express themselves in a way that may be more comfortable than through writing. They allow us—as both learners and teachers—to share whatever we want, whether it be real or not. No one has to know the truth, for a mask can be seen as a screen between what is fact and what is fiction.

The response when we have used mask making with adult learners has been overwhelmingly positive. The classroom activities include making masks, sharing them with others, telling the stories behind their creation, and reading and writing activities connected to the poem “Mask” below (as well as other pieces of writing dealing with masks).



2. to explore the links between visual representation and reading and writing activities; and
3. to encourage understanding of the value of art and crafts in society as well as their use as forms of communication.

We suggest that the mask-making activity be a part of a series of activities and we have found the following sequence to work well:

**Session 1:** Read poems or other writings on mask-making and discuss them. (See *Mask* poem on next page for one example.)

**Session 2:** Make masks.

**Session 3:** Write about the masks that were created, share these writings and discuss.

**Post-sessions:** Display the masks, with the accompanying writing pieces, at the adult learning center or in another public space. Perhaps display them on the program’s web page.

**Additional suggestions:** Visit local museums that may have mask exhibits, do a lesson on how masks are used in various cultures (have people share if the culture they are from has a tradition of mask making).

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*Michele Sedor has worked in the field of adult education for 15 years. She currently works at the System for Adult Basic Education Support in Western, MA.*

## Why make masks in your classroom?

We have come up with three learning objectives:

1. to explore social and cultural perceptions of who we are;

## Mask-Making Instructions

NOTE: This is an abridged version of a mask-making activity. Please see the complete detailed directions for this activity at: [www.nelrc.org/changeagent](http://www.nelrc.org/changeagent).

**TIME:** about 3 hours

**COMPONENTS:** Preparation, application of mask materials to learners’ faces, drying and decorating

**MATERIALS:** plaster gauze strips, petroleum jelly, water, soap, newspapers, items for decorating masks, etc.

The process of mask-making doesn’t require special techniques or tools. What it does require is a degree of trust among the participants, particularly the pairs as, in turn, one learner applies the wet, sticky gauze material to the other’s face to create the mask. It also requires patience because the masks dry on participants’ faces. With just a little planning and facilitating, it can be a wonderful, sloppy, humor-filled experience.

In short (and please see the full directions on the web), masks are created in pairs with one learner first applying petroleum jelly to the partner’s face (to prevent the plaster from peeling skin off). Once the petroleum jelly is applied the wet gauze material is applied thickly enough to create a mask. (The full directions include

information on how to place the gauze to create the sturdiest masks.) At this point it is important to be mindful of the partner’s preferences regarding having his/her eyes and mouth covered. (Masks with holes for eyes and mouths are equally compelling as those with eyes and mouths covered.) Nostrils, however, are NEVER covered.

As the material dries on the learner’s face, patience and humor become particularly critical as any movement disturbs the final shape of the mask. The drying process generally takes 15 -20 minutes. Then the fun starts. To remove the mask the learner squints and wrinkles up her/his face to begin to loosen the mask. The mask is then peeled off with the gentle assistance of the partner. The final step is decorating the mask. This part of the process is straightforward—use glue, sparkles, paint, feathers, and any other decorative materials you have on hand.

You should allow 2-3 hours, depending on the size of your group, for the mask-making. Those who finish earlier can make plaster molds of their hands using the same techniques. (Remember to plaster only the top or bottom half of the hand, otherwise the plaster will need to be cut off when it dries.)

# Building Bridges of Cultural Respect

by Estrellita Brodsky

With the recent completion of my degree in art history, I set out to search for a position in the art field. Knowing that my family was from South America, a friend suggested I try a small museum in East Harlem, El Museo del Barrio, which had just expanded its mission to include the art of all Latin America. I met with the director, who thought I might be interested in working on an exhibition on Taíno the museum was just starting to develop. I wasn't quite sure who or what Taíno was but, enthusiastic about Latin American art in general, I said yes.

Three years and many long nights later, I discovered that I was not alone in having been unaware of the fact that the Taíno were the pre-Columbian people from the Caribbean, originally Puerto Rico, Cuba, Jamaica, Haiti and the Dominican Republic. The exhibition I helped organize was the first in the United States to comprehensively study this legacy shared by so many Americans.

We highlighted the fascinating culture of the Taíno that flourished between 1200 and 1500. The children and adults who visited the exhibition were moved by the experience often noting how little they had known about their own history and how proud they were to see the sophistication and beauty of their ancestral culture. And others with tremendous knowledge about European and Asian cultures could now see the work of people geographically much closer to our North American continent.

My experience at El Museo demonstrated how effective outreach into the community could be in forming new bonds of respect and pride between people of different heritages. The comments written by visitors reflected that response: "Before entering the museum I was unaware of how deep my Puerto Rican history was, I've never been so intrigued. I also realized that I've been taking my culture for granted. Thank you." And another visitor from a Dominican background wrote: "Thank you. At long last I have been able to participate in an experience that both defines me as a Dominican American young woman from a mestizo ancestry and a member of a culture that has gone unheard. It was both an educational and emotional experience for me." And finally: "You made us all proud! It's a wonderful thing our culture is being shown and loved by everyone."

*Estrellita Brodsky is the vice-chairman of the board of trustees of El Museo del Barrio in New York City.*

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## Exploring the *Mask* Poem

### *Mask*

by William J. Ditto

THE MASK is a part of me that is hidden,  
something I can't live with nor without.  
It's in me and I'm in it.  
My life is torn between what I want  
and what I can't have.  
So I feel that I've lost something I never had.  
I find myself in pain.  
Behind this mask is a  
cry from within,  
Echoing these feelings.  
Is this all that I am?

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1. In the first line, what is "the mask"?
2. How do you feel when you read the poem?
3. In your own words, tell what the poem is about. Why do you think the author wrote it? What was he thinking about?
4. Write about a time when you felt that you had a mask on.
5. Think about real masks that you have seen. What is their purpose? What do you think of when you see them?

Another wonderful piece to use in the classroom is the first stanza from "Masks of Woman" by Mitsuye Yamada, page 114 in *Making Face Making Soul Haciendo Caras Creative and Critical Perspectives by Women of Color*, edited by Gloria Anzaldúa, Aunt Lute Foundation Books, CA. 1990.

# Improvising and Orchestrating A Poem Play

by Martha Merson

**EDITORS NOTE:** An effective way of giving learners a context within which to deal creatively with issues of social justice is to introduce a class to literature that raises such questions. In such an endeavor the teacher has a dual responsibility: first, to help students develop the reading skills necessary to understand the piece; second, to develop opportunities for students to explore the issue. In the following article, Martha Merson gives an example of just such a lesson strategy. The poem she uses can lead to a discussion of the dynamics of power within a courtroom setting and how these affect the delivery of justice.

What can you do in an adult basic education class when learners have trouble reading with expression and so undermine both the reader's and the listener's comprehension? Modeling reading aloud and encouraging attention to the descriptions that accompany dialogue can help, as can involving learners as characters in a text.

This poem lends itself particularly well to such experiments. The language is not too complicated. The poet, Martín Espada, establishes the characters with a minimum of description. The ending with its *not* made-for-Hollywood dose of realism leaves the door wide open for discussion, re-visioning, even rewriting.

The following ideas for text-rendering have worked for me in several situations, including an advanced ESOL class, teens only tutor training, and pre-GED and GED classes of mixed age, mixed gender, and mixed race learners.

## Before Reading: Setting the Context

Use the following prompts to lead a discussion.

1. Who here has been to court? Watched courtroom scenes on TV (that should cover just about everyone)? Whom do you find in a courtroom? In housing court in particular? What adjectives would you use to describe the courtrooms you have seen? Comfortable, noisy, sterile, intimidating? For someone who has never seen or been to one, how would you describe the people you find in a courtroom? Who has the power? Do they have anything in common?
2. Reading poetry is similar to listening to music. Sometimes you get the message loudly and clearly. Other times you get a feeling, but you don't necessarily "get" all the words. You will hear the poem a few different times. It might strike you differently each time—you might get a different meaning from it. That will be something to talk about.

## Reading the Poem

### I. Learners listen as you read the poem.

1. Read aloud two times
2. Discuss words that are unfamiliar to students.
3. Ask: What feeling do you get from the poem?

### II. Learners take parts in the poem.

1. Direct learners to take a look at the punctuation, especially the quotation marks. Note the signals for when one speaker starts and another ends. Discuss the fact that the poem has a narrator.
2. Assign parts. Have the judge, tenant, landlord, and narrator stand at the front of the class. Read through the poem in parts at least twice. Change parts. Keep some actors and add new students to the mix.
3. Ask: How does hearing the poem this way change it?
4. You may try this variation: Have actors and narrator turn their backs to the class and then turn around to say their lines. You can get a revolving door effect. The effect highlights the fact that the characters are pretty much talking past each other.
5. Ask: How does hearing the poem this way change the meaning of the poem for you? Ask the students who took roles: how did your character fit or not fit you? What might you have said or done differently if it had been you as the judge, tenant, or landlord?

### III. Reading Around

1. Read the poem aloud as a whole group. This time each person reads one line and one line only. The key is not to let too much time go by between lines. Try to get the rhythm going. This could take some practice. Learners may have questions about the pronunciation of words in their line. Practice quickly with anyone who needs coaching. Stand in a circle for better unity, especially if the class members sit in rows or some other configuration where they can't see each other.

2. Ask for volunteers or call on three people to choose their favorite lines. Each repeats the line or phrase over and over in a whisper. It is fun for them to get increasingly loud or simply louder when their line comes up and then their voices drop off again. They are the equivalent of the percussion section. The others read line by line over them as in #1.
3. Ask: How did hearing the poem this way change it? I find that of all the variations, this one is the biggest challenge to everyone's concentration. Following along and reading aloud while there is compelling background noise is difficult. This configuration of voices is most likely to lead to chaos, but it is also very powerful.

Ask learners who have been in courtrooms if they remember the courtroom being noisy and distracting. Ask: After you've heard the poem this way does your sympathy for the tenant grow? He failed to strenuously advocate for himself, but it becomes understandable when one has to try to read, never mind think and then talk, in a foreign language amid a confusion of voices.

## After Reading: Roving Court Reporter

1. Use a pen or another prop as a microphone and begin interviewing members of the courtroom about how they feel about the results of the hearing. In addition to asking the tenant about the outcome, you can invent the tenant's roommates or neighbors who might have comments on the outcome and what they wish had been said.
2. Pass the mike to anyone else who wants to be court reporter and give him or her the latitude to interview at length. It is often interesting to interrogate the judge about the fairness of his decision and his attitudes toward people from El Salvador. Has he been to El Salvador? Does he realize there are cities there? This is harder than it looks and a round of applause is due to all involved.
3. Invent a housing advocate who comes on the scene to confront the judge and the landlord. Discuss what options tenants have when their homes are infested with rodents or are in other ways in violation of the housing code. Would having an advocate with them in court change what they felt they could say? Why or why not?

*Martha Merson is currently the research associate for the Extending Mathematical Power project based at TERC in Cambridge, Massachusetts. She has been an adult basic education practitioner for 14 years.*

### Tires Stacked in the Hallways of Civilization

—Chelsea, Massachusetts

by Martín Espada

"Yes, Your Honor, there are rodents," said the landlord to the judge, "but I let the tenant have a cat. Besides, he stacks his tires in the hallway."

The tenant confessed in stuttering English: "Yes, Your Honor, I am from El Salvador, and I put my tires in the hallway."

The judge puffed up his robes like a black bird shaking off rain: "Tires out of the hallway! You don't live in a jungle anymore. This is a civilized country."

So the defendant was ordered to remove his tires from the hallways of civilization, and allowed to keep the cat.

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# History through Quilting

by Michele Sedor

Quilts are often only thought of as bedcovers or as blankets to keep us warm, yet they can be so much more. When you see a quilt that someone has made, do you think of the stories that were sewn into it? Do you wonder what went through the mind of the person sewing the quilt, as they worked on it?

Most quilts have a story. It may be the story of how the quilt was made, or it could be the story of what was happening in the world while the quilter created the quilt. Quilts are often seen as objects of art or craft but they have important roles in history, too.

## Quilts and the Civil War

Women could not vote during Civil War times. They could, however, quilt and some women chose to “tell” their political opinions through the quilts that they created. They made designs of fabric that showed how they felt. They expressed their opinions by sewing words onto fabric.

There are some stories that say quilts played a role in the Underground Railroad. Some people say that certain quilt patterns gave slaves directions for finding their way on the Railroad. Others say that a quilt hung a certain way outside a home, or one made with specific colors told runaway slaves that this was a safe home for them to go to. None of these stories have been verified but they continue to exist. Historians say that these stories are myths and that people should understand that they are not based entirely on fact. People who wanted slavery to end were called abolitionists. Some of these people incorporated antislavery themes into their quilts and sold their work to raise money to help end slavery. An example of an abolitionist message sewn into a quilt is, “May the work of our needles prick the conscience of the slaveholder.”



Section of an AIDS quilt made by World Education/John Snow, Inc. staff.

## Quilting and AIDS

One of the best-known quilt projects in the world is the NAMES Project. The quilt began in 1985 as a way to remember all of the people who had died of AIDS-related illnesses. People make a quilt panel that includes the name of someone who has died and send it to the NAMES Project. The Project then includes the panel with all the others, making one large quilt. There are now over 45,000 quilt pieces (or panels) in the Project. It is not a quilt that is used. It is much too large to be viewed all at once so pieces of it travel and are shown throughout the world. The panels are used for education, to remind people of the impact that AIDS has on us all and to help raise money for AIDS-related work.

While many quilts are made with the intention of being a functional object to keep us warm, others are made to make a statement about an issue, or to make us remember something of importance. Telling stories through fabric is a unique and lasting way to document history.

**Note to teachers:** *It has not been historically proven that quilts were part of the Underground Railroad. An interesting exercise would be to have learners do research on the web about the role of quilts in the Underground Railroad. There are Web sites that support the stories, as well as ones that claim that these stories are fictitious. Ask learners to think about why these stories persist, when historians dispute them. Have them look up information on the web and in print that both supports and refutes these stories. Facilitate a classroom debate over whether or not these stories are true. Areas to critically discuss are what gets told in history by whom and why do certain stories persist while others don't?*

Michele Sedor is an associate coordinator at the System for Adult Basic Education Support in Western, MA. She has been a quilter since 1990 and has incorporated quilting stories and activities into the ABE classroom.

## READING COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

- Find another word in paragraph four that is similar in meaning to “antislavery.”
- A myth is
  - a fact
  - a question
  - a story that is told but may not be based on fact
  - an historical story
  - a person from another planet
- A story about which of the following quilts would most likely be added to the passage you read? Why?
  - One bought from a department store.
  - One made to express someone’s feelings about the events of September 11, 2002 and added to a traveling exhibit of similar quilts.
  - One made from scraps of fabric for a baby.
  - One sold at a craft fair.
  - One found in a quilt shop.
- In paragraph four, it says that there are stories about the use of quilts in the Underground Railroad but that many people say these are myths. Why do you think these stories continue to be told if they can’t be proven?

## Additional Resources

The AIDS Memorial Quilt  
< [www.aidsquilt.org](http://www.aidsquilt.org) >

Brackman, Barbara. *Quilts from the Civil War*

Johnson, Ann. *Abolition Quilts and the Underground Railroad*  
< [www.womenfolk.com/historyofquilts/abolitionist](http://www.womenfolk.com/historyofquilts/abolitionist) >

Jones, Clive. *Stitching a Revolution: The Making of an AIDS Activist*

Tobin, J. and R. Dobard. *Hidden in Plain View*

Wulfert, Kimberly. *The Underground Railroad and the Use of Quilts as Messengers for Fleeing Slaves*  
< [www.antiquequilt dating.com/ugrr.html](http://www.antiquequilt dating.com/ugrr.html) >

A bibliography of books on quilting, including children’s storybooks, and those related to quilting history, is available at < [www.sabeswest.org](http://www.sabeswest.org) > .

# Sculpting Relationships

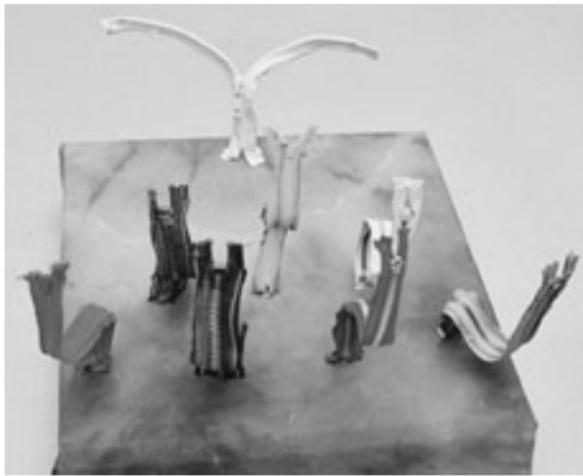
## Examining the Politics of the Literacy Classroom

by Bonnie Soroke

My first artwork using zippers began after two very different educational experiences that had a profound effect on me. To work through and express my feelings, I created zipper sculptures to represent the contrasting experiences of being a silenced student in an authoritarian classroom and the very different experience of being part of a dynamic, collaborative educational setting.

Since I had free access to a photocopier at the time, I made a collage of my collection of fabric and zippers right onto the photocopier to create the images. Later, I created a poster of these images to use in a workshop that I presented to adult educators. Since then I have wanted to create more dynamic and accessible artifacts that I could use in my teaching, research and in my life. The artifacts

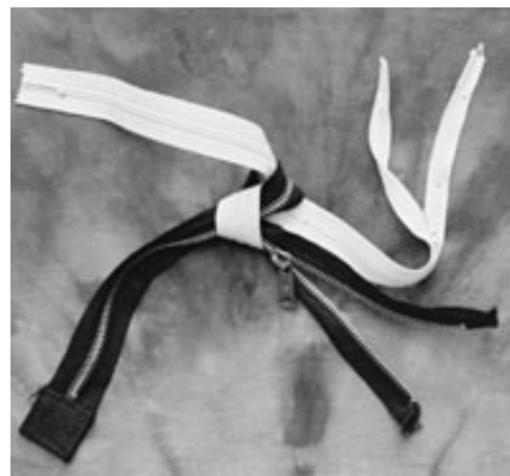
I've been creating keep speaking to me in new ways—mostly through other people's responses and interpretations and also through my changing perceptions as I grow and change. I am currently using zipper sculptures to examine and question the politics of literacy including: power and authority relationships; the role of literacy itself; the "culture of silence" of learners; and the myth of emancipatory literacy.



These two sculptures are based on the first zipper collage made by Bonnie. From left to right they are "Banking Education" or "Blah, Blah, Blah" and "Collaboration" or "Community."

### First Zipper Sculptures

I had been tutoring in adult literacy and was always interested in exploring learners' experiences in their education. During a session with Mary, one of the learners I was involved with, I brought some zippers along. I wanted to show her the images I had created to help illustrate the relationship dynamics I had experienced in education. Well, something resonated for her—she took two zippers and knotted them and started talking about a knotted, non-communicative relationship she had with a tutor.



"Knotted"

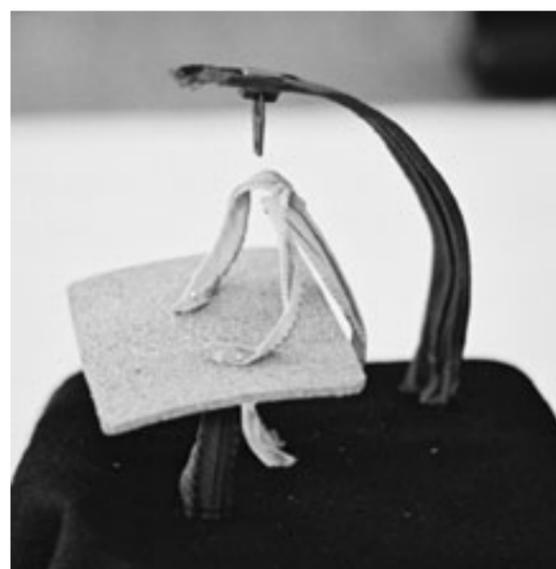
Then she continued to talk about her experiences with tutoring, sometimes using zippers to demonstrate her stories. She chose a small zipper to represent herself, and a tall zipper that was the tutor, then talked about how she often felt like a child during some literacy tutoring sessions. We continued to talk and play around together, creating "scenes" using zippers, books and some of our snacks that were on the table. It was wonderfully exciting to play with images and communicate at such different levels.

Out of that wonderful session with Mary grew a strong desire to create images that were dynamic and alive and changeable. I explored ways to make the zippers stand up and "move" by sewing in wire so they could be shaped and malleable. Mary's story of the child/adult feeling grew into this sculpture that I've titled "Oppression."

### Zipper Sculptures as a Research Tool

For my thesis research I did fieldwork at the Reading and Writing Centre, a unique adult literacy program in Duncan, British Columbia, that has the goal and vision to be a learner-run center. I wanted to explore questions

I had about power and authority in education. After interviewing students and teachers, I created sculptures to reflect back what I heard from them. When I first showed them some of the sculptures, I was a bit nervous about their reactions. At first, there was little response. After I talked about why I made them, some people nodded, others laughed, and some made suggestions. Later, we talked more deeply about issues related to the sculptures. Working with a group in this way—interpreting and reinterpreting the sculptures, letting the process be open-ended so the meaning continually evolves—is what makes this such a dynamic and powerful research tool.



"Hovering"

"Hovering" was created after I heard many students talk about that feeling of a teacher hanging over them, often pushing and nagging at them. This sculpture, about student/teacher relationships, was actually used many times during my research project as a dialogue tool. We would move and bend the standing figure into a new shape or posture in order to represent different interpretations and elements of the issue.

Zipper sculptures have been used in variety of ways: as communication, as expression, as a research tool, and as a reflective tool. This next stage of my work is giving opportunities for others to create zipper sculptures. I am keenly interested in making the art process more accessible and utilized within all levels of education. Art is not just something you do on Friday afternoons as a break from schoolwork. Art needs to be more integrated into the whole process of education because all people do not learn the same way, do not see and think in the same ways.

It's taken me until now, as a student in graduate school, to finally allow myself to use art in a similar way to words. This has been such a struggle because society gives the written word much more power and influence than visual expression. Zipper sculptures have given others and myself "permission to play" with art and explore in a powerful way our lived experiences as teachers and students.



"Oppression"

Bonnie Soroke has long been involved in both childhood and adult education in Canada and abroad. She is currently pursuing a Masters degree in Educational Studies. Bonnie offers workshops for literacy practitioners, administrators and learners to dialogue about issues in education and to create sculptures either individually or collaboratively. Contact her at <soroke@interchange.ubc.ca>.

# MAKING ZIPPER SCULPTURES

by Bonnie Soroke

**TIME NEEDED:** 1.5-2 hours

**MATERIALS:** **Tools:** scissors, hole punches, exacto knife, bodkins (large needles to poke holes in things)

**Zippers:** a variety of colors, lengths and types of zippers (metal teeth, nylon teeth, cotton and synthetic fabrics, invisible zippers) with wire sewn into them – allow at least 2 wired zippers per participant, several zippers without wire

**Wire:** telephone wire or other bendable wire (try a 26 gauge, pliable wire) cut into lengths of about 8-10”

**Pins, toothpicks, pipe cleaners, etc:** Gather anything you can use to stick into the base like straight pins (the long ones with colored heads), bamboo skewers, a variety of pipe cleaners, colored paper clips, feathers

**Bases:** Any dense (not sponge-type) foam will work.

**Decoration materials:** plastic netting (from onion bags and wine bottles) – cut into about 4” lengths, lace and ribbon, elastics, beads, buttons, bundles of string or yarn, sheets of old microfiche, clear tubing (from hospitals). Also tissue paper and sheets of craft foam (used to cover the Styrofoam bases)

**Containers:** individual containers (metal film tins, cookie tins, various boxes) in which to keep separate materials and return recyclable scraps that could be reused.

## FINDING THE MATERIALS

Most of the materials I use in my workshops are recycled—I save, scrounge, and reuse many different kinds of materials. Zippers can be collected from friends, second-hand stores, and taken from old clothes. Telephone wire can be obtained from the telephone company, or scrounged from wastebaskets (in bundles of wire encased in long lengths of plastic sleeves) after workers finish jobs of replacing telephone wire with new fiber optic materials. Use foam from stereo and computer packaging, certain kinds of Styrofoam insulation, flotation foam or swimming “noodles” (cut into various-sized pieces) are great because they come in many wonderful colors.

Ensure you have an overall variety of textures, colors, and shapes. I’ve learned through my experiences that the type of media offered to people affects their level of involvement. There’s a wonderful effect in using recycled, yet interesting and beautiful materials—playfulness emerges because of the freedom involved: the materials are not expensive, precious, or limited.

Some recycled materials are also available for purchase. I am fortunate to have worked with an arts and recycling association that collected the cast-offs of many industries and businesses throughout the city. There is still a store (Urban Source: <[www.urbansource.bc.ca/contacts.html](http://www.urbansource.bc.ca/contacts.html)>) that sells these amazing recycled items. Some that I use include:

- ♦ colored foam cylinders (source unknown),
- ♦ pieces of heavy zigzag, fanlike fabric (from the making of window blinds)
- ♦ gold and silver foil streamers from printing businesses
- ♦ sheets of Mylar (mirror-like)
- ♦ sheets of colored acetate from printers
- ♦ die-cuts (paper pieces of all colors, sizes and shapes)
- ♦ prism strips
- ♦ sheets of colored vinyl tape that you can peel and stick (used for lettering on cars, billboards, etc.)

## BEFORE THE WORKSHOP

### SEW WIRE ONTO THE ZIPPERS

The zippers are made stiff and malleable by sewing colored telephone wire onto them. Two pieces of wire are machine-sewn onto the back of each zipper using a narrow zigzag stitch. Start by placing the zipper on a table with the front side down. Choose two pieces of wire to sew on the left and right sides of the zipper. Leave 1-2 inches of wire extending from the bottom of the zipper (these wire “feet” are pushed into the base to make the zipper stand up). To sew the telephone wire into the zipper, start with the zipper open, sew halfway down one side, then close the zipper carefully to ease it past the zipper foot.

### TEST YOUR MATERIALS

If the materials and process are new to you, I would suggest that after acquiring all the materials and before your workshop, play with them by yourself or with a few other people to create some sculptures. This way you can test out your materials and familiarize yourself with different construction techniques (one time I didn’t know that some foam pieces were so dense and hard that nothing could be poked in easily until we used them in the workshop).

## GIVING THE WORKSHOP

### SET UP

It’s important that the materials are sorted, neat and attractive – you are transforming “junk” into art materials and the presentation is important.

1. Display materials in their individual containers on a long table or counter that is easily accessible with clear traffic area. If you run out of room, the bases can be put on the floor at one end of the table/counter.
2. One small table for tools: hole punches, exacto knife, bodkins
3. Enough work tables with scissors on each one. (Remove chairs unless people really want/need them, so people move more freely from their work table to the materials and tools areas.)

### INTRODUCE THE IDEA OF ZIPPER SCULPTURES

It is helpful to give participants a visual idea of what zipper sculptures are and how others have used the materials to create sculptures. People have told me that this is an important part of the workshop because it “eases participants into the idea of becoming a creator of art from junk.” A good way to do this is by sharing the photos of sculptures in this paper or viewing the sculptures online at: <[www.c2t2.ca/](http://www.c2t2.ca/)> and search for “zippers.”

### DEMONSTRATE

The idea is to attach materials together without glue or tape, but by poking, bending, folding, and slitting. Demonstrate how to:

1. Poke the wire “feet” (1-2” of wire extending out the end of the zipper) into the foam base to make the zipper upright
2. Use the bodkin or hole punch to make holes
3. Use telephone wire to attach or tie things together
4. Cover the base with either tissue paper, colored acetate or craft foam pieces using straight pins or toothpicks to attach

### PLAY & CREATE

After demonstrating the techniques, bring people’s attention to the materials and the bases, encouraging them to simply walk through and look, picking out whatever materials that interest them. Ask that they take their materials and a base to the table and start to play. Some people may want to work independently and others may want to work in pairs or small groups. As participants begin to work, pay attention to what kind of encouragement and support they need. Some people have a very definite idea and then struggle with the actual physical techniques of creating that idea. Others have no ideas, and simply need encouragement to connect with the materials they like and the trust that something emerges as they play with the materials.

### VIEW & DISCUSS (Allow at least 5-10 min per person/group)

When the sculptures are finished, set them on a viewing table, or walk around and look at all of them.

Then, sit down as a group and bring out one sculpture at a time. Before the artist talks about their piece, viewers comment on what they see in the sculpture, what they notice, what stands out for them. Then listen to what the person who created the sculpture wants to say about it. (You may want to tape record this with permission.) After questions and discussion on the piece are concluded, move onto the next one. After all sculptures have been shared, you may want to take photographs of each of the sculptures (with the artist if they are willing). For those who cannot or do not want to keep their sculpture, deconstruct it and return the useable materials back to their containers.

Use the sculptures as a concrete springboard for whatever suits the nature of the group: ongoing discussions, writing starters, Freirian “codes” to explore issues in people’s lives or in the community. Individuals have shared their reflections about their actual sculpture and about their process of creating even weeks after a workshop. Because the ideas, feelings, and reactions to these sculptures continue to work in people long after the workshop is ended, what was surfaced during the process can be revisited and built upon by an individual, class, or group for some time.

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# Who's afraid of music?

By Carol Estes

When silence is impossible, when injustice is unbearable, sometimes a song, or better yet, a lifting of many voices can tell a radical truth that is not easily dismissed.

Music, as Pete Seeger observed, is “more powerful than the bomb.” It has played a role in every significant social change movement from abolition to Civil Rights to peace to feminism to world hunger to AIDS to anti-globalization. It’s been warning-labeled, enlisted, protested, outlawed, blacklisted, backlashed, co-opted, demonized, corporatized, and homogenized.

But the beat—and the song—goes on.

It’s not just any music that threatens the status quo—some music *is* the status quo. It’s one particular kind of song. The song of the outsider. The disenfranchised. The down-and-out. It’s the song of those to whom the promise of justice and equality was not kept.

This is trouble music—spirituals, protest songs, blues, folk songs, or rap. Its power lies in the poetry of survival, of lives marked by what Woodie Guthrie called “hard travellin’.”

## A talent for truth-saying

Explains bluesman Li’l Son Jackson, this music is about “a feeling that you get from something that you think is wrong, or something that somebody did wrong to you, or something that somebody did wrong to some of your own people or something like that. And the onliest way you have to tell it would be through a song.”

And so the slaves sang:

*“Oh, Lord, Oh, My Lord!  
Oh, My Good Lord!  
Keep me from sinkin’ down.”*

The men on the chain gang, doing hard labor from before sunup until after sundown, sang:

*“Water boy! Where are you hiding?”*

Woodie Guthrie wrote songs that spoke for the striking migrant farm workers in the Dustbowl years:

*“From the south land and the drought land,  
Come the wife and kids and me,  
And this old world is a hard world  
For a dust bowl refugee.  
Yes, we wander and we work  
In your crops and in your fruit,  
Like the whirlwinds on the desert  
That’s the dust bowl refugees.”*

Jailed civil rights protesters sang “Freedom Is a Constant Dying,” a song written by a 23-year-old Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) voter registration worker from Cleveland, Mississippi.

The best of these trouble songs tell a truth more vivid than the news, a truth many of us don’t see—or prefer not to.

“Truth is a powerful agent,” writes author Walter Mosley. “It only needs to be spoken once. After that the world has changed.”

## But why sing?

If it is truth that changes the world, why not just speak the truth? Or write it? Or shout it? Why bother to sing?

Because singing is safer than the alternatives, more memorable for the listeners, and less likely to provoke a violent response from the authorities.

Jamaican reggae singer Bob Marley, one of the first Third World superstars, deliberately chose music to give a voice to the people” of Kingston’s shantytown. “Them belly full but we hungry,” Marley sang, “A hungry mob is an angry mob.”

As a way of speaking the truth to power, singing is less confrontational than any other option—even when the lyrics directly challenge authority. Singing is like smiling. In language that’s ancient and nearly universal, it says, “Look! I’m singing. I’m not going to hurt you.”

American slaves took advantage of this apparent harmlessness to

communicate musical messages of rebellion and plans for escape under the noses of white overseers.

Songs are persistent. They get into our brains and live there, long after other forms of communication have faded. That’s why we remember verbatim the songs we sang as children when we’ve forgotten the words we spoke.

Those who study social movements say that music establishes a movement’s identity, provides a channel for resistance, raises consciousness, and educates, mobilizes, inspires, and encourages the discouraged.

Woodie Guthrie and Joe Hill were particularly good at articulating the complaints of working people in the 1930s. Guthrie sang about poor folks fighting “to win a world where you’ll have a good job at union pay, and a right to speak up, to think, to have honest prices and honest wages, and a nice clean place to live in and a good safe place to work in.” The peace movement of the ‘60s and ‘70s that eventually helped end the Vietnam War was given spirit, unity, and focus by singers like Pete Seeger, Phil Ochs, Bob Dylan, and Joan Baez. John Lennon’s song, “All we are saying is give peace a chance,” became a mantra sung at peace rallies everywhere.

The civil rights movement did a better job than any other of using music to inspire and empower. Martin Luther King, Jr. spoke of how it cheered him when he was in jail to hear the people singing. Candie Anderson, jailed in Nashville in an early Civil Rights protest, was also moved by the music of the movement: “Never had I heard such singing. Spirituals, pop tunes, all became so powerful. The men sang to the women and the girls down the hall answered them. ...We sang a good part of our eight-hour confinement that first time.”

Recently, the riches of black musical traditions metamorphosed into hip hop and rap. In the 1980s, rappers picked up the political megaphone and started shouting angry, impatient, sexual, hard-edged, political rhymes. Their message was powerful, disturbing, and fresh in the Reagan era, a time when, as Bob Dylan observed, the rappers were the only ones with anything interesting to say.

But hip hop is only one of several heirs to the rich tradition of African-American protest music. Reggae thrives. Calypso continues to deliver scathing indictments of oppression. And, from the ‘70s forward, a secular brand of gospel has attracted a large and devoted multiracial audience. This music is strongly spiritual and deeply rooted in the music of Africa and the African-American church.

In 1903, the historian W.E.B. DuBois described the former slaves as the “children of disappointment” and singers of “sorrow songs.” The same description would fit migrant farm workers, coal miners, steelworkers, prison inmates, and urban ghetto dwellers.

But DuBois also noticed something unexpected about their songs. “Through all the sorrow... there breathes a hope—a faith in the ultimate justice of things.”

DuBois, who had thought deeply about “the souls of black folk,” understood well what it means to live with injustice and sing out against it, to weave hope and music from despair. To sing, and to keep on singing, despite mountains of good evidence that your song will fall on deaf ears, is not just an act of faith in the power of music, but in the human spirit itself.

*Carol Estes, former managing editor of YES!, is a freelance writer and chicken herder in Suquamish, Washington.*

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## ACTIVITY

- 1) Agree on an issue in your program or community that your class feels strongly about.
- 2) Brainstorm songs that express how you would like to make change about the issue and would help you work for change.
- 3) Learn one song and sing it for another class. Teach them the song and ask them to help you work for change.

# The Soundtrack to History

by Thane Thomsen

Throughout history, music has provided a soundtrack, if not a catalyst, for social change. Listening to the music of specific historical periods can help us understand the powerful social dynamics of those times of intense change. Music can be used in the classroom to develop an understanding of the mood and context of many important social movements. The Harlem Renaissance, a social and cultural movement of the 1920s, is a great period to explore.

The Harlem Renaissance stemmed from the amazing accomplishments of African-American writers, artists, and musicians who had moved to Harlem (in New York City) in the period between the end of the Civil War and the end of World War I. During this incredibly rich and diverse movement, expressions of African-American experiences reached a mainstream audience for the first time. Among the many great talents who contributed to the Harlem Renaissance were writers Langston Hughes, Zora Neale Hurston, and Claude McKay; painter Aaron Douglas; performers Paul Robeson and Josephine Baker; and musicians Bessie Smith and Duke Ellington.

Duke Ellington composed and performed thousands of jazz pieces, including a great number of jazz standards, in a career spanning from the 1920s into the 1970s. In 1927, Duke and his band began performing regularly at the Cotton Club in Harlem. Although the performances were for an all-white audience, the songs Duke wrote and played during these shows captured the spirit of life in black Harlem.

Duke's recordings from this period are plentiful and easy to find. Duke's orchestra included saxophones, clarinets, trumpets, trombones, bass, drums, and piano. One way to ease into using music in the classroom is to listen to such songs as "Harlem Air Shaft," "Creole Love Call," "The Mooche," and "Black and Tan Fantasy," and simply discuss which instruments are playing which parts. This is a great way for learners to become familiar with the sounds of the different instruments. It also provides a great forum for talking about the structure of jazz. For example, listen to "Mood Indigo," a famous composition from the Harlem Renaissance period, and simply count out the beats of the song. The song starts with the chorus, which lasts for thirty-two beats, followed by a horn solo for thirty-two beats, and then a piano solo for sixteen beats, and then the chorus again for another thirty-two beats. This helps people to understand the structure behind what can seem an extremely complicated musical form.

These songs also are about Harlem during the 1920s. In order to help get a sense of this period, I suggest that teachers supplement music listening with reading from the same period. The poetry of Langston Hughes is a great place to start. Hughes' poetry from the 1920s, like the jazz of Ellington, was based on the structure of the blues. It has a very strong rhythm and the language is relatively straightforward.

For example, the poem "Harlem Night Club," from the book *Weary Blues* depicts the importance of jazz music to African-Americans in Harlem by utilizing the rhythm of the music itself: "Sleek black boys in a cabaret / Jazz-band, jazz-band, — Play, play, PLAY! / Tomorrow... who knows? / Dance today!" With these lines, Hughes' presents the urgency and joy of the musical experience alongside the uncertainty of life for many African-Americans at that particular moment in history.

The history leading up to this moment is very rich. A good question to pose concerning this history is: Why did so many African-American artists move to Harlem between the end of the Civil War and the Great Depression? A thoughtful and well-researched answer could touch on such important aspects of American history as Reconstruction, industrialization, the influx of immigrants, the Jim Crow South, and the roaring twenties. The great artistic accomplishments of Hughes and

Ellington, along with other Harlem Renaissance artists, work well at fleshing out this history. An appreciation of their accomplishments lends itself to a more complete picture of the African-American experience, one that incorporates joy and success as well as struggle and despair.

In 1952, Ellington recorded what is perhaps his greatest composition, entitled "A Tone Parallel to Harlem." A year earlier, Hughes had published what is probably his most famous poem, "Dream Deferred," which was originally entitled "Harlem." These two works can be used in combination to illuminate the hopes and frustrations of African-Americans just prior to the civil rights movement. Using Ellington's composition to set the mood, ask learners to elaborate on the central question of Hughes' famous poem: "What happens to a dream deferred?" What dream is Hughes'

referring to? What is he suggesting by concluding the poem with the line, "Or does it explode?" Was he unknowingly foreshadowing the civil rights movement, or perhaps referring to the riots that had plagued Harlem in the 1930s and 1940s, and would break out again in the 1960s? Ellington's composition sets an appropriate tone, climbing to great heights musically, yet always reverting to the structure and sadness of the blues. Hopefully, the experience will inspire learners to think about the way African-Americans experienced the "American dream" in the first part of the twentieth century.

Another recommendation is viewing Ken Burns' *Jazz* documentary as a way to make connections between the development of jazz as an art form and the changing condition of African-Americans in American society. Volumes three and four in this series have incredible footage of Harlem in the 1920s and also offer interesting explanations of what motivated the musicians who lived in Harlem at this time.

There are many other historical instances that could be interestingly illuminated by exploring the music of the time. An example that immediately comes to mind involves the relationship between slavery and the development of the blues. Other examples would be the role of folk music in the civil rights movement and the role of rock and roll in the anti-war movement of the 1960s.

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Illustration by Beth Ammons.

## Musical Warm-up

1. What music did you listen to when you were growing up?
2. What did this music teach you about your culture and life in general?
3. What else did you learn from that music? What was important about it?
4. Do you listen to other kinds of music now? Why?
5. Do you play an instrument or sing? If so, what kind of music do you play or sing? Why?
6. Choose a question and make a graph to show the answers in your class.

# Theater for Social Change

by Donna Gaspar Jarvis

On a chilly, winter afternoon, in a spacious makeshift classroom held in a hotel conference room, eight women stood in a circle taking turns sculpting each other like human clay into various poses and configurations. Through silence, broken only by the occasional nervous giggle or sharp exhalation of self-exasperation, the women tried to create still-life photographs using only each others' bodies to depict the word "freedom." The women were part of an adult education program that worked with domestic violence survivors; they were involved in one of several experiential learning workshops designed to help introduce them to alternative and creative ways of expressing themselves. Through interactive play and the use of a creative technique termed loosely as participatory theater, the women found ways to address and explore complex topics, using their voices and bodies in ways other than in discussion.

Participatory theater is an experiential learning technique being used by some educators to help participants gain awareness of a particular issue in a hands-on way. Cathy Plourde, a Maine-based theater facilitator and playwright, is one educator who uses participatory theater in her work to help people make discoveries and reflect upon themselves and their role within a larger group context.

"Theater is about doing," says Plourde. "We're a society based and judged on what we do. Theater fits into how we work as a culture . . . action is the embodiment of ideas to be able to see how our bodies inform others, perhaps reveal or betray our own feelings or perceptions. It's a different type of literacy. People know more than they think they know. Theater can empower people to be stronger and feel more confident about what they know."

Participatory theater gets learners out of their chairs, on their feet, and engaged in a transformative process. Unlike traditional theater, in which a play or scene is performed, participatory theater is less of a final product, and more of a process. Participants express themselves, their ideas, and their perspectives on themes or life issues in a creative and physical way thereby learning about themselves and an issue in a less cognitive, more experiential way.

The idea of doing "theater" or "acting" can be intimidating for people who have never performed and don't see themselves as actors. Participatory theater, however, is not a technique used for actors, and participants are not expected to act or perform in the traditional stage-acting sense. True to its name, participatory theater is an experiential learning method designed for people who don't necessarily have any prior acting experience. People can participate as much or as little as they feel comfortable. In the process, they are invited to take risks and to engage in meaning making. There is no right or wrong way to do it and no pressure to "entertain."

Plourde, who works with both youth and adults in various educational settings, says there is one universal benefit that she sees in using participatory theater techniques: breaking silence and finding a voice.

"If I had to pick a single point for working in theater it would be to break silence," says Plourde. "You can do that with action as well as with words. The goal of breaking silence fits into any work that I do. Theater can help you find your own voice. It's about seeking to communicate with another; seeking to be heard, and seeking to educate or make others aware of something."

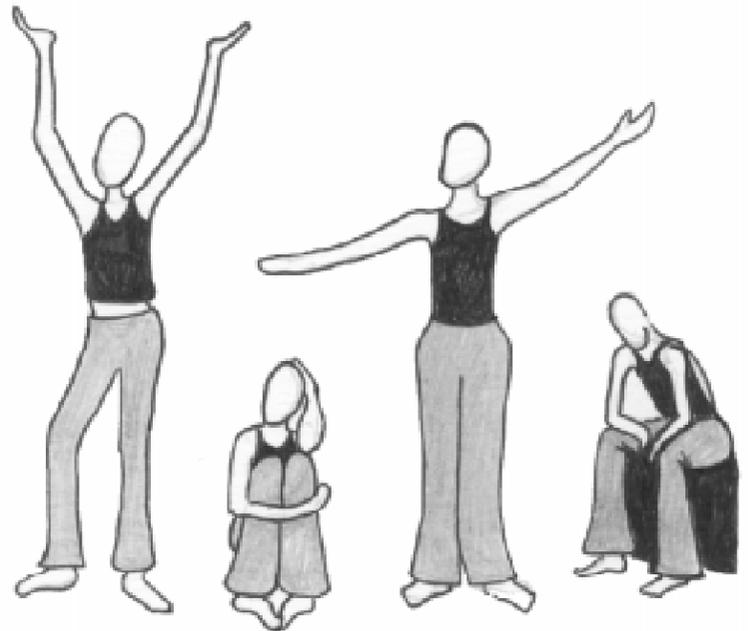


Illustration by Beth Ammons.

## Why Use Theater in the Classroom?

There are many reasons why participatory theater can be an effective educational approach. Its benefits include: helping people act and react spontaneously, providing a tangible process for reflection, and offering an experiential learning venue for generating dialogue and meaningful discussion. Participatory theater can help improve group dynamics and group morale; it can open communication channels, break down hierarchical relationships, and build team support through the spirit of play. On an individual level, it can help people express themselves in new ways, experiment with different ideas or personas in a safe, nonthreatening setting. Theater can also help people gain confidence or increase comfort levels in areas such as risk-taking, or adapting to change and new experiences. On a societal level, it can galvanize communities to reflect upon societal issues or systemic oppressions and explore ways to solve or change them. As such, participatory theater becomes a practical vehicle for grass-roots activism. Recognizing the potential and potency of theater as an educational process is not only important, in some cases, it can be nothing less than revolutionary. In one instance, Brazilian theater activist Augusto Boal, who created an innovative technique called Theater of the Oppressed, even used a form of participatory theater in the mid-1990s to bring about legislative change in his home city of Rio de Janeiro. While he served as a Vereador (representative) in the Worker's Party, he used participatory theater in local neighborhoods to identify key community problems in the city. He then took the ideas generated by the theater forums and created legislation to submit to the Chamber, some of which was actually enacted into law.

## Working Theater into the Classroom

Participants, who may not get "the point" of doing theater type activities right away, may initially be reticent to join in the process of participatory theater. Unlike children, who spontaneously engage in the spirit of play, many adults become increasingly more censored, more guarded, more fearful of trying new things or breaking out of preconditioned roles as they get older. Theater or improvisation may be a risk for some, and it may require some time (longer than say a half hour lesson, for example) to build trust and warm a group up to feeling comfortable improvising and acting out meatier "issues" in a theatrical form.

With sufficient time and commitment from the instructor, the use of participatory theater techniques in the class environment can be a creative supplement to a lesson plan. This holds true especially if a course goal involves identifying a group or societal issue, and seeking ways to problem-solve or explore possible change. While perhaps not a mainstream teaching technique, the use of participatory theater to examine social issues has proven successful in various educational settings and is being used nationally and internationally. At the very least, participatory theater may be an exciting new avenue for adult educators to create dialogue and discussion around particular issues in their own classrooms. At best, its use will stimulate imagination and excitement among participants as they seek possible solutions, and perhaps ultimately foster ideas for individual or social change.

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## RESOURCES:

A great source for finding out more on how to incorporate theater games or creative drama techniques into everyday classrooms is the book *Theater Games for the Classroom, A Teacher's Handbook* (Northwestern University Press, 1986) by Viola Spolin. In addition to a list of practical games and exercises, this book also offers a comprehensive bibliography of other teacher resources.

For a good list of resources on improvisation, Readers' Theater, and storytelling techniques visit the web sites:  
<[www.learnimprov.com](http://www.learnimprov.com)>  
<[www.aspa.asn.au/Projects/english/rtheater.htm](http://www.aspa.asn.au/Projects/english/rtheater.htm)>  
<[www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/index.html](http://www.storyarts.org/lessonplans/index.html)>

There are several excellent books and training manuals that give explanation and instructional direction on problem-solving and techniques for change including Boal's *Games for Actors and Non-Actors* (Routledge, 1992) and Michael Rohd's *Theater for Community, Conflict & Dialogue: The Hope Is Vital Training Manual* (Heinemann, 1998).

# Participatory Theater Techniques

by Donna Gaspar Jarvis

## Theater Games

Even those who are not “theater people” can use participatory theater techniques in everyday adult education settings. Someone new to participatory theater could start out with simple theater games, designed to loosen people up, and get people moving around and interacting. Theater games may be used like icebreaker games: to help break down barriers and galvanize a group. But theater is far more potent and can be surprisingly revealing. Bob Crotzer, the former Coordinator for Adult Basic Education at the Department of Education in Augusta, Maine is one participant with no prior acting experience, who surprised himself in the process of doing participatory theater exercises. “At first, I didn’t want to do any of the acting as I felt I wasn’t an actor,” he said. “The theater games intimidated me, embarrassed me and I didn’t like doing them. Now I love it. People who get involved, tend to really get into it and become committed.”

Theater is oftentimes a great equalizer. It can allow people who are shy in traditional communication settings to emerge and even shine in a new medium, and ultimately feel more confident or accepted within a group as a group progresses with its goals. Also, through the spirit of play, participants are encouraged to take creative risks, work together, support one another, and often laugh and enjoy the process—all wonderful catalysts for building trust and group cohesiveness.

## Storytelling, Readers Theater, and Improvisation

Participatory theater may also be used to liven up lesson plans around a particular topic, theme, or piece of literature through various theatrical techniques such as storytelling, Readers Theater, or improvisation (see resources on page 20 for more information on each of these different techniques). For example, if a class were reading and discussing excerpts from Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn*, students could explore the concept of race by discussing and improvising short skits around contemporary social issues in which a person feels isolated or ostracized by a group based on race, ethnicity, or other difference. Giving students a tangible way to reflect upon and ultimately act upon a socially relevant theme allows the topic to be brought to life and internalized. As such, it allows the issue to be felt and experienced from an emotional standpoint rather than just an intellectual one.

## Image Theater

Lastly, educators may wish to use participatory theater as a means to explore larger social issues, identified by a particular group, as a catalyst for dialogue and problem solving. As in the opening anecdote, one way to do this is through a theatrical technique called image theater, which is a Theater of the Oppressed technique, developed by Augusto Boal. Different variations of Boal’s Theater of the Oppressed are used to allow participants to not only discuss and analyze certain issues, but also to look for ways to problem-solve and act out possible solutions in what Boal terms a “rehearsal for change.”

## Two Classroom Activities

### THE HUMAN KNOT

**Goal:** To warm-up a group and begin breaking down barriers

1. Begin by having everyone stand in a large circle. Ask each person to shake hands and greet someone standing next to them (either side).
2. While still holding that person’s hand everyone must reach with his or her other hand to shake another person in the circle’s hand. They can not let go of the first hand until they are holding a second person’s hand.
3. Once they have found a new person to greet, they let go of the first hand and the game continues. The goal is to keep moving as swiftly as possible and to try and shake hands with as many people in the circle as possible. Everyone should be holding on to at least one hand at all times. People are encouraged to get out of the circle formation and get tangled up as necessary as they continuously reach for new hands.
4. After several minutes, the facilitator yells “freeze.” Ask everyone who has a free hand to find another free hand so that everyone is holding two hands, no matter how tangled up the group gets.
5. Then, instruct the group to work together, without letting go of anyone’s hand, and try to untangle themselves back into one complete circle. When back in a circle, have everyone let go of hands.

#### Reflect

Ask participants: Who was comfortable or uncomfortable doing this game? Why do they think that is? What did people observe about themselves when they were trying to work together to untangle themselves? Who tended to want to take charge and lead the rest of the group? Who wanted to be told what to do? What made them successful/unsuccessful in completing the task? What does this say about group dynamics? What do they think was the point of this activity? How could they possibly apply what was learned to other class activities or group discussions?

### SILENT IMAGES

**Goal:** To create body sculptures of important issues and feelings in order to deepen understanding and create new meaning.

#### Choose the Issue and Demonstrate

1. Brainstorm the issue(s) you will be exploring with the group (for example, racial intolerance, gender roles, or violence in the community).
2. Ask participants to share what the different issue mean to them.
3. Generate a list of single words (theme or emotion such as fear, anger, loyalty, etc.) that come to mind around the issue.
4. Demonstrate the process with a volunteer. With permission, sculpt the human clay by touching and moving him/her into position or mirroring what position she wishes the person to take. The entire activity is done in silence.

#### Sculpt

1. Everyone gets a partner. One partner will start as the sculptor, the other as clay. In pairs, form a circle so that the sculptors are facing in and human clay is facing out.
2. Call out a word from the list, and ask the sculptors to create an image in response to the word. Their image doesn’t have to have a literal meaning. The final sculpture can be realistic, concrete, abstract, symbolic. There is no right or wrong response to this activity. Do not spend too much time thinking—encourage sculptors to think with their hands.
3. When everyone has completed their image, have sculptors walk around the circle as if doing a gallery walk, looking at all the different physical expressions and interpretations of a single word. Have partners switch places and choose a different word for the new sculptor to create.

#### Reflect

Discuss possible similarities or themes that emerged. What images appeared the same? What opposing images were there? How did the activity illustrate the complexity of the issue? What were some of the different viewpoints from which this issue was expressed? Who or what were some of the roles involved around this issue? Remember, there is no right or wrong in this process. Sculptors do not have to explain what they meant by the image they created. People should just discuss what they saw, and what the images could possibly mean.

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# Art and Activism

an interview with Jessica Spohn

by Lenore Balliro

Talking to Jessica Spohn brought back memories of the early seventies, when many artists and filmmakers used their talents to support the struggle for social justice. “I come from a family that believed that you work to change society for the better,” said Jessica, a long-time practitioner in adult basic education who started her life career as an artist. Jessica recently traced her development as an artist and explored how the social and political context of time and place helped define her work and direction.

“My perspective in life was framed by the war in Vietnam and the Civil Rights movement; there was an expectation that it was our responsibility to make this a better society,” she said. “People had the feeling that real changes in society were possible—there was the black power movement, the women’s movement—it was an exciting and progressive time.”

After formal art training, Jessica began to work in film and animation, and explored themes commonly used in advertising in her animation. “Advertising attempts to manipulate self-esteem. I grew up with the advertising mantra; you have one life to live, why not live it as a blond. If you convince a person that they do not meet a certain concept of attractiveness, as this mantra tries to do, you have created a life-long marketplace for a slew of worthless and expensive products. I wanted to use advertising techniques and themes to expose the negative messages behind the attractive images.”

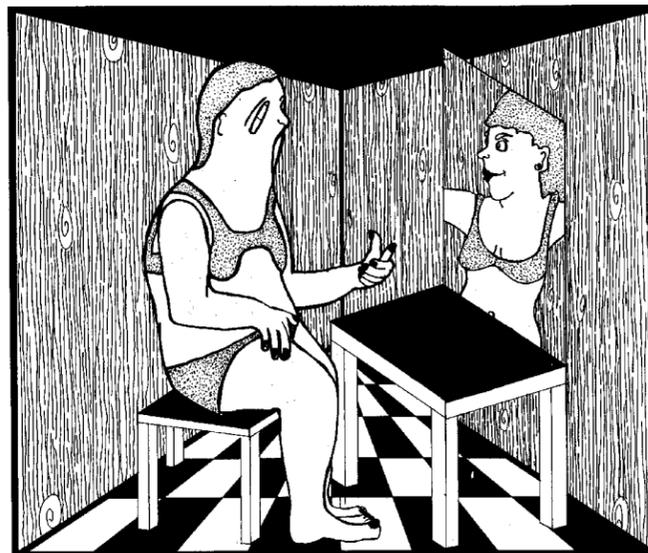
Jessica’s work combined images from advertising and mass culture in jarring ways so people would see a different perspective in the images they were being bombarded with every day. “I might make an image of a beautiful woman with a cigarette coming out of her breast instead of her mouth,” she said. “I also felt the need to challenge how society defines sexuality—especially how confining it is because of rigid definitions of what it means to be male or female, gay or straight.”

When asked why she chose art as a medium to express her political beliefs, Jessica was clear: “I never made the choice to be political, I was an artist first and the themes that I felt compelled to explore had political connotations. Some of my work was not overtly political, some of it was.”

As her career developed, Jessica became part of a community where politics and art were intertwined. “Many of the artists I worked with (myself included) felt a responsibility to make society look itself in the face,” she said. She became involved with making documentary films on social issues, worked as a cartoonist and developed a post card business. She donated her time and talent to political organizations by creating posters and brochures for them.

Most artists never make a living solely through their art so Jessica supported herself by working as a graphic artist. Eventually she began doing more and more commercial and work and less and less personal art. “My goal was always to impact society in a positive way with my art. At a certain point I felt like I had nothing left to say.”

In 1978 Jessica worked in a project teaching youth and the elderly how to make intergenerational oral history films. It was then that she knew she loved teaching. She got a job in the NYC public school system where she worked as a sixth grade teacher for five years. Later she taught ABE, GED, and ESOL in urban adult basic education centers. Jessica was able to bring her skills as an



TRYING TO CHANGE HER EMOTIONAL MAKEUP!

artist and animator into both elementary and adult basic education classrooms. One activity she used many times is the making of a memory necklace (see activity below). “Art is a very effective vehicle for learning. It allows the individual to express powerful and complicated feelings and experiences. It opens up a creative and rich dialogue and it can be a very concrete way to teach abstract concepts.”

Though Jessica’s career has changed over the years from artist to educator, her desire to work for a more just society remains constant. “The power of art is that it allows a person to experience a different perspective, it allows you to see things through a different set of lenses. That can help a person question their preconceived ideas and try on different ways of living. Teaching can also allow you to introduce different perspectives and values. Maintaining a connection—a creative force—is important so we can always find new ways to express who we are, how we see the world, and how we’d like to change.” What’s your way?

Lenore Balliro is a poet and the editor of the adult education quarterly Field Notes. She has worked in ABE for over 18 years.

## ACTIVITY

by Jessica Spohn

This is an activity I have used many times. I’ve modified it based on the type of class I’m teaching. Sometimes we make a memory necklace; sometime we make a necklace that explores aspects of each student’s personality and character traits. Sometimes before beginning the activity I work on vocabulary by introducing a list of adjectives that describe both the beads and personality traits. For example, lustrous, shiny, metallic, luminescent, glowing.

As the students work, they engage in dialogue about what the necklace says about them. They can also make the necklace about someone important to them if the process makes the student uncomfortable. The activity is very liberating. Students seem to feel free to say very strong and positive things about themselves using the necklace as a vehicle for self-expression. I have the students talk about their necklaces in front of the class if they feel comfortable doing so. In some classes, the activity is followed by a writing assignment.

### STRINGING THE NECKLACE OF YOUR LIFE

#### On your own

Read the instructions below. If you have a tutor, both of you should do the activity together.

#### In a group

Each person in the group should make a necklace. A Talking Circle could be held at the end of the session to talk about each person’s necklace. Anyone can choose not to talk if she wants.

You will need beads of different colors, shapes and sizes and a piece of fishing line or waxed thread long enough to make a necklace.

Think back to the first memory you have of your life. If this is too hard for

you, think back to a time where you feel comfortable starting. Choose a bead that means something to you about that memory (example: you may choose a bright yellow sparkly bead because it makes you think of playing outside on a sunny summer day when you were seven years old). String the bead on your thread. Think about another time in your life and pick another bead for the memory. Keep doing this until you make a necklace that you can use to tell the story of you life.

Your story will be unique! No one else’s story will be exactly like your story. Your necklace will be unique! No one else’s necklace will be exactly like your necklace.

Think about how far you have come in life. Wear your necklace with pride!

From *Claiming Our Place* by Jan Sherman and the Women’s Group at Action Read. Reprinted by permission of Action Read Community Literacy Center, Ontario, Canada.

# A Life of Art Searching for Peace

by Ivonne A-Baki

Art is a means of communication, and communication holds the key to conflict resolution. My artistic work has always been the resolution of an inner conflict, a peaceful one but intense nonetheless. Sometimes diplomacy, which is just formal government efforts at conflict resolution, is called an art. So there's a connection between the two that I can now experience first-hand as the Ambassador of Ecuador to the United States who is also an artist, or the other way around.

Both my passion for art and my search for peace grew out of my experience in Lebanon, while I was raising a family in the midst of the war.

Perhaps it was the anguish of a mother fearing the ultimate loss of a child, or the sleepless nights as war raged on that made me realize the value of peace and the need to devote one's life, if necessary, to achieve it. I dreamt of the simple, precious things in life that I could not entirely enjoy, and peace became almost an obsession, a life-defining objective.

I realized that I could neither let myself become a helpless victim of tragic circumstances nor another link in a vicious cycle of hate and destruction. There had to be another way, one that would lay the ground for a permanent peace—and peace of mind.

I took a hard look at my reaction: there was nothing extraordinary in my aspiration, so it had to be shared, at some level, by everyone else. If war is never unavoidable, then why did politicians insist on escalating confrontation, rather than defusing it and promoting understanding?

I perceived that at the grassroots level there was a genuine desire to lead peaceful lives, but years of conflict had left scars and a complete lack of direct communication. How could this barrier come down when every gesture from the opposite side was regarded with contempt and suspicion?

The answer came to me disguised as a hobby. I had started painting as a way to maintain my sanity in a senseless war, and the levity of art in such grave circumstances helped me relax and gain new perspectives on almost everything. Soon, I discovered the power of art. As an artist, I realized I was free to express my thoughts and emotions, even those that I could not voice as a woman in the Middle East.

People of all walks of life and from every background appreciated my paintings and understood my message although I am afraid many would not have let me say a word on the issue of women's rights in another environment. As an artist, they even asked me to interpret the paintings and elaborate on my message! I also noticed that people from Europe or America could appreciate the paintings and somehow relate to them, despite having no experience in the Middle East.

My experience has led me to conclude that those inclined to appreciate art can do so regardless of background, even if they don't agree entirely with the message conveyed. I sensed in a personal way that art could spread a message, even a revolutionary one, without the slightest threat of violence, for people will seldom reject art entirely.

I hope that the link between art and conflict resolution will become ever more evident, and someday we will all be able to enjoy art in a peaceful environment.

Ivonne A-Baki, Ambassador of Ecuador to the United States since 1998, is an artist who has had major exhibitions in Ecuador, Lebanon, France and the United States.

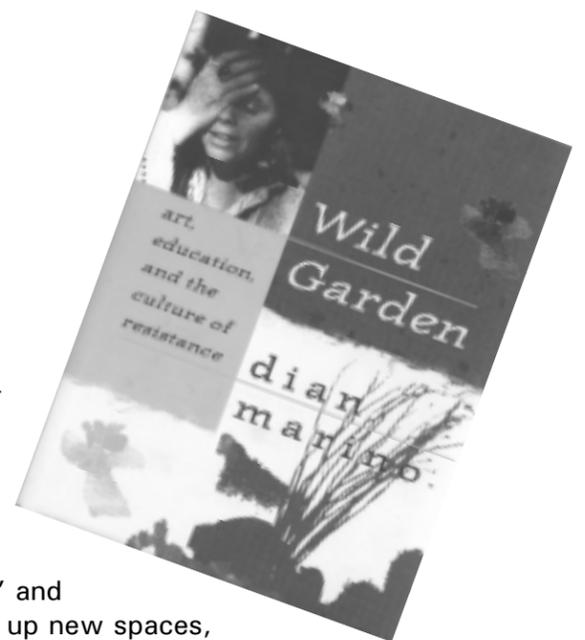
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## RESOURCE

### Wild Garden

*Art, education and the culture of resistance*  
by dian marino

dian marino was a visual artist, educator, storyteller and professor in the Faculty of Environmental Studies at York University, Toronto. This book, a tribute to her life and work, shares dian's lifelong experiences in education. *Wild Garden* is a collection of dian marino's ideas, art work, and classroom activities that relate to the roots of teaching, the nurturing and production of knowledge and challenges to "basic assumptions" and "common sense." It is also about how writing and art can open up new spaces, spark subversive thoughts and creative action. The combination of her writings and personal reflections, art and graphic images and teaching tools convey a dynamic approach to participatory learning. With over fifty pieces of art, this beautifully produced book will delight, confront, and occasionally perplex readers who question received ideas about living learning, and growing together.



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Adult Education for Social Justice: News, Issues & Ideas

# THE CHANGE AGENT

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New England Literacy Resource Center

# THE CHANGE AGENT

## CALL FOR ARTICLES FOR THE NEXT ISSUE

**THEME: Language and Power**

**Educators and Adult Learners:** We are looking for lessons, activities, and student writings about the ways in which we speak, read, and write (what languages we speak, how we use and understand words, how others speak to us, etc.) can include certain people but leave others out.

**Some questions to think about:**

- What ways of speaking do people use in different situations and why?
- What experiences have you had using different languages (for example from other cultures, or from other disciplines like math, art, etc.)?
- In what ways are people judged by the way they speak? What do you think about this?
- Should there be a law making English the official language of the United States? Why or why not?

**All articles must be received by November 15, 2002.**  
All articles will be considered. Final decisions are made by *The Change Agent* Editorial Board.

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