

Speak Curriculum Phase I

This CD, made from the voices, experience, faith and insight of radical women of color media makers is the book I have been looking for, the skywritten messages I wanted to make out of clouds, the conversation that changed my life. This CD has opened up my world with the strength and vision of a world transformed by the bravery and integrity of women of color every day. I can only imagine what would have been possible in my life if I had heard these stories sooner.

We are proud to present this CD, a manifestation of our love, a piece of our growing analysis and investment in the world we want to live in to you.

These discussion questions are designed for your use, by yourself or in community. We would love for you to have listening parties with people you move and work with, bring this CD into your organization or classroom, or to send us your responses to these questions. We hope these pieces help ignite much needed conversations in your community and inspire your individual creative process as well.

We are providing some discussion questions to start with and some activities to engage. We would love to hear from you at SPEAKCD@GMAIL.COM so your voice and the voices of your community can join the chorus!

We look forward to your feedback and participation.

love,
SPEAK

Why do you speak? (Adele)

The speaker says "words have no meaning unless you can feel their vibration." Why do you think we chose to open this CD with such a fierce invocation? How does the volume and intensity of this piece make you feel? What does it awaken in you?

Why do you speak? When do you speak? What does it take for you to raise your voice?

What does it mean to speak?

What do you hope the outcome of your speaking will be?

The author asks, "Do you speak to record your people?" In a society where we've been taught that the only valid history is that which has been passed down through writing, how is speaking to record your people a radical act?

What's your song of a thousand years? Who are you speaking for? Who are you speaking to?

Activity: In your group or by yourself think of one word that you need to scream out loud right now. On the count of three **DO IT!**

How did it feel?

Something Else to Be (Sydette)

This piece is inspired by Toni Morrison's novel *Sula*, which centers around the relationship of two black girls who develop an intimate, powerful and possibly dangerous friendship with each other. The speaker in this piece dedicates her piece to another black woman with the assertion "we get to be girls together."

What does it mean to "be girls"?

Why don't girls of color "get to be girls?"

What violence, limitations and oppressive views make this piece necessary? Why is the act of WoC defining themselves, even after 160 years of feminism, such a radical one?

Is youth a luxury? Who can afford youth and who cannot?

If you were going to lovingly dedicate a piece to someone you love and identify with, who would you dedicate it to?

What would you call the piece?

Write it! (And we really hope you send it to us.)

Slip (Meagan)

In this piece the poet brilliantly uses the "s" sound to demonstrate the insidious and lasting effects of racial slurs, in particular a racial slur launched against Latino/a people in the United States. One of the impetuses for this CD and the collective work of the womyn who created it is the pervasive racism in new media spaces, even supposedly progressive spaces like the world of feminist blogs.

Why do racial slurs/racist behaviors "slip" so easily from people who deny "being racist?" Why do those who are bothered by accusations that they might be racist...not bothered by their own racist actions or words?

What feeling and memories does this piece bring up for you?

What ideas does this bring up for how you can respond to blatantly racist incidents in/against your community?

This piece makes a direct link between violent language and the physical violence of hate attacks and police brutality. What is the impact of hateful language? What is possible when we reclaim language?

We Will Never Forget (Nadia)

In this piece a young Palestinian-American woman writes about the position of being a part of an oppressed group, whose very situation of oppression is deeply silenced.

Why are the speaker's first words to girls who want to know "about us" a warning—why does she feel a warning is necessary?

"You make it real."

The speaker recounts seeing a razor blade on the ground and remembering acts of cutting and self-harm that girls sometimes engage in, in an attempt to make their silenced pain real and tangible enough to deal with. How does violence come to the surface in our lives when it is suppressed and made invisible in public?

The speaker talks about an "us" made up of different generations of Palestinian and Palestinian-American people and dedicates her words to people who want to advocate for "us," learn about "us." What is the "us" that you feel accountable to in your work?

How do members of an oppressed group keep alive "memories of us," "stories of us" in a world that silences them?

What are 3 things that you will never forget...that you will always remember?

When I Speak (Aaminah)

In this piece, presented as a voice message, a Muslim feminist organizer and mother describes the ways that her voice is devalued and discounted by those looking for "experts" with degrees, overlooking her lived experiences. Her role, always in the background, is imposed on many women within so-called revolutionary movements. When will we remember to listen to each other regardless of educational status? How can we remind others that we are each experts on our own lived experiences?

"Surviving Isn't Education"-With this phrase, the speaker points out the narrow point of view of the audiences that ignore her insight. Surviving IS education. What have you survived? What have you learned?

"Mothering Teaches no Marketable Skills": Again, this phrase points out that some of the skills most vital for our survival and the well-being of our communities are devalued by people inside and outside of those communities.
What does mothering teach? Why aren't those skills for sale?

We Are the Daughters (Lisa)

This piece speaks in a powerful collective voice about the multiple legacies radical women of color live into and the danger, violence and treachery we face. As you listen write down the three phrases that resonate most with you.

"With riches, without inheritance." This piece centralizes the immigrant experiences of radical women of color the daughters of immigrants and the dispossessed. What riches do we have access to? What are the pros and cons of being without inheritance in this system?

"To kidnap us." The speaker describes the special lure of scholarships and academia and the tokenizing desire of mainstream institutions to steal us, the daughters, away from our ancestors. What do we lose when we prioritize this validation over our own legacies? How can we navigate the institutions that invite us in?

"We are the daughters the world hoped would die in our mother's bellies." Why are we so dangerous, coming from the mothers and the histories that birthed us? Why should the world fear our brilliance and creativity?

"And rejoicing." Take a moment and think about the difficult miracle that brings you into this world and fill in the blanks,

I am the daughter of _____
I am the daughter of _____
I am the daughter of _____

Severance (Sylvia)

This piece is a missive from a black feminist blogger who is fed up. Comparing her work as a blogger to a 9-5 gig she outlines the motives, means and manifestation of her severance from a particular community.

Have you ever felt fed up and decided to leave a group, a relationship, a home? What made you leave, what were the terms of your severance?

What do you need to be supported and sustained in the homes that you live and work in?

Where do you imagine that the speaker goes when she takes her values out of her cubby and packs up? What might she have access to on the other side of her journey?

Imagine that you are writing a welcome letter for the author, what would you say?

Tears and Beauty (Stacey)

This piece draws a thread from the hidden history of ancestors, to the transformative sisterly relationships of peers to the possibility of a future created by our honesty.

How do the speaker's words outline the limitations of the "American dream" for certain groups?

For you, what is the relationship between tears and beauty? Are tears beautiful? Does beauty bring tears or vice versa?

Do you claim histories that have been forgotten or debased? Who are your people before the taunts and slander?

Do you have peers that you embrace into chosen family? What does that look like, what do you open to each other?

When someone asks you who you are, what will you say?

An Archeology of Freedom (Lex)

This piece was created in honor of the 10th anniversary of the Allied Media Conference in Detroit, where it was performed as part of an interactive keynote "Our Evolution Beyond Survival" by the poet and 6 other women of color. Called an "Archeology" it presents fragments of a past present and future characterized by water, ground, body and air.

This piece invokes the names of a number of ancestors and current participants in a creative progressive movement. What are the names of the people you draw on for inspiration? Bring those names into the room.

What are fragments, things that you have found, noticed or imagined that hold keys for our collective survival?

The poem talks about heirloom seeds and fossils in gardens. What are the intergenerational possibilities in your community, what is growing there?

What are you ready for, now?

My Cats

This piece was recorded by one of our beloved daughters, an original piece that she wrote about her cats. The growing voices of the youngest girls of color among us are a priceless treasure that we hope to nurture with our every action.

What do you hear in the cadence and laughter of the speaker's voice?

What do you make of the care the speaker gives to characterizing each pet and her relationship to them?

Name some of the countless reasons that it is important to listen to our children.

Notice the wild cheering from the older women of color (on the other side of a soundproof wall) and the speaker's reply "I'm not so nervous anymore." Spend some time imagining some of the things that a girl so beloved and embraced will be able to do in life.

Reality (Noemi)

"Reality. We were never meant to survive." This piece on the "browning of America" and the oppression of people of color and especially Latin@s in the United States references Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival."

What does this piece teach us about the need in the US to perpetuate an "underclass," a group of people whom we use to sustain what it means to be citizens while simultaneously denying them entry into the narrow ranks of "citizenship?"

This piece combats "cultural genocide" by putting the relationship of Chican@s in context and listing some of the roles that Latin@s are playing in the US economy, in war, and in social life. What are some ways that you see the so-called "browning of America" in your communities?

The author talks about the struggle of raising anti-racist children who are proud to be people of color within a racist society, and of teaching a son to be non-sexist in a sexist society. How do our practices of mothering determine and transform what will and will not survive here? What practices can mothers employ to combat society's vested interest in socializing our children to accept and perpetuate hierarchies?

The poet offers her reality, in order to combat the stereotypes and lies that keep oppression in place. What is your reality, how can your reality challenge an oppressive status quo?

Sin

This piece is by a Latina mother and dedicated to a Latina mother but addressed to a racist and nativist audience that criminalizes the mothering of women of color. This piece specifically and personally explains how the attacks launched against mothers of color are key to the reproduction of racism and a limited idea of citizenship in the United States.

The speaker references the concept of deservingness. How do we determine who is deserving? Why don't WoC "deserve" to be mothers? Why don't their children "deserve" to be given life?

Think of how reproductive freedom is typically defined by (U.S.) feminists. How does the struggle of WoC to defend their rights to even be mothers reveal the limited and problematic nature of definitions of reproductive freedom that center only birth control and abortion?

Have you ever been made to be ashamed of who you are? Of your children? How does shame impact the way we relate to each other across and within generations?

What are the acts that make us human for each other? What are the acts that take away our humanity?

Is any form of your love considered a crime by someone else. Why? What is the radical danger of your desire, affection and love?

On Cartography and Dissection (Rose)

In this piece the author explores the phrase "here be monsters," drawn from old world maps, to make a statement about the ways official discourse turns oppressed people into the Other. She makes a connection between racism and transphobia, pointing out the parallels between the colonization of land and groups of people and colonization of our bodies and identities.

The speaker observes that, "The bigger our maps get the less room for [people labeled monsters] there is." How is this reflective of the way colonization works? Does mapping always mean claiming or "discovering"? Is there a difference between drawing lines of territory and making incisions on a body?

Think about the connections between the perception of the people and the perception of the land in areas labeled with the warning, "Here be monsters"—particularly, reflect on how the people who live in areas referred to as "wild," "savage," "uncivilized," or "jungle" were constructed by others. What do "foreign" or "exotic" mean to you?

In the piece, the "monster" is both a creature and a place named by someone else. What does it mean to speak your own name, as opposed to having someone else name you out of their fear? What are the names you claim? What are the names imposed upon you?

The author says this is a piece about "intersecting borderlands and finding a way to assert that you're right here and you are your own home, no matter what lines someone else draws over and around you." What are some ways that you have found to assert your place, to be at home, regardless?

Genocide (Nadia)

This piece juxtaposes the large presence and memorialization of the Nazi Holocaust against the near invisibility of other enactments of genocide in the 20th and 21st centuries. Particularly discussing the use of the Nazi Holocaust against Jewish people to justify the ongoing genocide against Palestinian people, this piece asks why and how genocide can be used to perpetuate more genocide.

The speaker begins the piece with the observation, "We are never allowed to use the word genocide." What are some of the reasons the systematic annihilation of certain groups is never referred to as genocide?

"This is too important." In the piece the author lovingly chastises a family member who says that "the Israelis are just like Nazis," reminding him that what the Israelis have done is big enough to stand on its own without the Nazi comparison. How can we understand the systemic persecution, the attempted annihilation of groups of people without comparing one genocide to another or succumbing to a contest about whose loss was/is greater?

The author mentions that teachers and textbooks are "forms of media." What systems of education would we actually need to stop and prevent genocide in our lifetimes?

Chaos (Fabi)

The author wrote this piece while a police officer was banging on her door, and she dedicates it to the many people who face the criminalization of poverty.

"knocking down...hope in the world" the author explains that the police officer is knocking down not only the door, but also threatening her hope in the world. What kind of hopelessness does a police state produce? How does the criminalization of people living in poverty impact their ability to hope? How does it impact everyone else's relationship to hope?

"like you've come to arrest" the author points out that the police officer is using such great force you would think he/she had come to arrest someone perpetrating real mass harm on the world. What is the impact of the harm enacted by "white collar criminals" compared to the harm of those criminalized for living in poverty?

Take a moment and visualize what it would look like if the criminal (in)justice system even pretended to apply it's force to those in the who are positioned to cause the most damage.

"My peace is sacred." What can the term "peace officer" possibly mean? The author makes the name "peace officer" ironic because of course this so-called "peace officer" is causing chaos and violence in her life. What does true peace look like to you and the other people in the room?

"My pen my only weapon..." the author explains that the only way she can respond to this police officer is this poem. What are other tools for response that we have or wish we had to respond to state violence?

Song of Solomon (Sydette)

In this piece on blackness and beauty, the author references an operatic version of a bible verse that she says is translated "wrong."

If the Shulamite's statement in Song of Solomon could've been translated as black and comely OR black, but comely, why might the translator have chosen the latter? How is this an early example of "exceptionalization?"

How does this piece both produce and redefine beauty? Through sounds? Through questions? Other ways?

What else do you know of that is translated "wrong"?

This piece references a long history in which the blackness and beauty have been understood as mutually exclusive opposites within systems of slavery and racist oppression. But the author suggests that the beauty in blackness should NOT be a surprise. Black is beautiful. So what, specifically is beautiful about blackness. Name at least three things.

Black is beautiful. What impact do we have when we value and lift up that which is degraded in the very logic of our language? What else is denied its beauty in our society?

_____ is beautiful.

_____ is beautiful.

_____ is beautiful.

Sequestro (Meagan)

In this piece about the difficulties of the mother who is an artist in a "machista" or macho and sexist society the poet describes herself as kidnapped into the labor and limitations of a system that threatens to silence her muse.

The speaker compares the writing process to giving birth. How does this help us to understand her anger and sorrow?

What keeps us from fully validating/celebrating the other creations that women birth? How would such validation challenge the way the role of mother is constructed under the patriarchy?

How do "los gemelos, the twin terrorists" show up in your life? Are these forces that threaten our creativity also creations that we are partly responsible for?

Machismo is running the whole operation. What non-patriarchal ideas of family can we imagine that will affirm everyone's creativity?

Wishful Thinking (Lex)

This piece was written for the National Day of Truth-telling in Durham, North Carolina an event that responded to the disrespect and violence against women of color, sex workers, mothers and students in that community and all communities during the Duke Lacrosse Rape Scandal. It was also inspired by an earlier piece of the same name created by Mendi and Keith Obadike in response to the police murder of Amadou Diallo (www.blacknetart.com).

What are three wishes that you have for yourself and for the people you love?

What makes these desires unlikely?

Choose some of the wishes. Discuss why they are only wishes—what circumstances prevent them from being a reality for WoC?

In what ways are you and your community making your wishes come true?

What impact does the music playing with this piece have on your experience of listening? Do you find the piece ironic, bitter, sincere, hopeful? None or all of the above?

I Feel Pretty (Rose et al)

In this track the speaker tells a story of joy in the midst of state violence, at a time when she was arrested during an anti-war protest. In the back of a police van, of all places, the protesters break into song, showing that it matters to sing even under lock and key, and that solidarity, group strength, and group resistance can all be supported by small acts of relentless human-ness.

How we can use joy as resistance? Is (as Alice Walker says) resistance the secret to joy?

How were the protesters meant to feel in the back of that van, threatened and tightly cuffed? What does it mean to refuse to feel despair?

"It's alarming how charming I feel." The song, sung by Maria's character in the musical *West Side Story*, is about a girl who feels pretty "and gay" because she is in love. Why is it important that the protesters use THIS song to cheer themselves? What are the forces that are threatened by them/us feeling "witty," "pretty," "gay," and "charming"? How can laughter, and even silliness, be powerful in a serious situation?

"*West Side Story*" is a musical written by white men, full of stereotyped Latina/o characters, and in the film version Maria is played by a white woman in brownface. Can a piece of music with such problematic history be reclaimed? What are the implications of an incarcerated queer woman of color repurposing such a song as a tool of resistance and solidarity?

What are resources, from popular culture or anywhere else, that you have transformed into tools for your own healing and resistance? What can you do to encourage hope, defiance, and joy in your community?

For those of us (all)

The phrase "for those of us" comes from Audre Lorde's "A Litany for Survival." This dedication for the CD comes at the end in order to send our words lovingly to you and to the universe that makes our speaking possible. We invoke our ancestors, our mothers and grandmothers, our mentors, young people and partners and people we don't know at all.

We believe that bringing and naming our love together makes the CD itself a sacred space.

Who else would you dedicate the words or insights you have found here to?

What does that act mean? What sort of connections are we trying to create and sustain?

What/who do you gather around you to create sacred space in your life?

What would words like the ones compiled here have meant to one of your ancestors? What could it mean to someone younger than you?