

Renewed Possibilities

Showcasing the Lived Realities of Black Girls using Ethnopoetics

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Abstract: In this article, I explore how ethnopoetics can be a profound research methodology and can also offer a pathway to self-actualization. When ethnopoetics is combined with a Black feminist/womanist theoretical framework, it allows for Black girls to self-define and self-validate their existence. The verse novel provides an opportunity to communicate Black girls' and women's feelings and experiences to researchers and educators in accessible ways. It also serves as a platform to grieve, praise, love, and grow. Such work stands in marked contrast to dominant narratives of Black girlhood.

Keywords: Women of Color, poetry, literacies, teacher education, teachers of color, writing



Some poems don't start like a flowing river
rippling over the page.
Some poems don't start as a storm
pounding out truths.
Some poems aren't the tides
washing over you.
Some poems aren't tears
relieving pain ... voicing heartache.
Now and then,
we stumble onto poetry,
tripping over the words,
sauntering around the rhyme,
and swaying back and forth
to its rhythm.
We breathe in the poem
and exhale its meaning,
and a once unwilling mouth
stutters over a newly found joy.
After said,
its sweet juices are an oasis to a voice long barren.
We savor it,
letting its flavor slide down our throats



Because now that it has been tasted,
No, now that it has been devoured whole,
we know full well what we've always known:
We are hungry for the written word.
We crave its attention.
We lust for its freedom.
We claim our voice.
Somehow in the chaos of ignorance,
an epiphany dawns
and we ...
we fall
hopelessly
and helplessly
in
love
with
poetry.

Introduction

This article began as an inquiry into how Wynn, a Black university student majoring in education, and I, a Black female middle-level literacies professor, used poetry as a tool of resistance. Unfortunately, the study ended prematurely when the realities of the COVID-19 pandemic forced US schools to close. Shelter-at-home mandates, however, did nothing to quell the racial violence enacted against Black bodies as witnessed by COVID-19's disproportionate effect on the Black community, and the brutal murders of Ahmaud Arbery, George Floyd, Breonna Taylor, and Oluwatoyin Salau. We wanted to write our way out and find shelter in using our pens, but our arduous realities did not lend themselves to writing prose. We needed the creative sanctuary that only poetry allowed. For us, as with centuries of Black women before us, poetry is always a gateway to possibility. We recommitted ourselves to poetic writing knowing that it would provide shelter for what seemed to be a never-ending storm.

A new writing project emerged between Wynn and me as we battled the isolation, loneliness, depression, and anxiety that COVID-19 caused and amplified. We were emotionally, mentally, and physically devastated, and we were alone. Our families and our friends' arms could not shelter us. As the news highlighted the increasing COVID-19-related deaths, we prayed and advocated for justice for Ahmaud, George, Breonna, and Oluwatoyin. Our memories and our present days were littered with racial, gen-

dered, and sexual traumas that we forced ourselves to forget. The seductive act of forgetting negates the fact that our memories “are always and in all ways also political, cultural, situated, embodied, and spiritual [and that] the often-radical act of (re)membering in our present lives and work [is] an act of decolonization” (Dillard 2012: 4). Even worse, the act of forgetting the past is entrenched in white supremacy because it seeks to create a revisionist and white-washed history (King 2014; Love 2019; Muhammad 2020). Any rigid view of time as linear and static only impedes actualization. Black women writers such as Zora Neale Hurston (1937), Octavia Butler (1979), Toni Morrison (1987), Jacqueline Woodson (2014), and Tomi Adeyemi (2018) always view time as a circular fluid artifact that can be entered and (re)entered to observe, critique, respond, manipulate, and challenge. We used their texts not only as literary touchstones but also as emotional and spiritual mentors. By studying their work, we learned that to heal, we need to engage our inner selves in soul speak, a complex raw and honest dialogue grounded in agape love (Evans-Winters 2019; Johnson and Bryan 2017; Smith 2019). Soul speak is but one of the many ways we can counter the spirit murders that routinely occur in public school classrooms, as all the contributions to Lamar Johnson et al. (2019) suggest, and demand an environment of mutual love and respect (Johnson and Bryan 2017; Love 2019).

It is important to note that when I say love, it is not the performative variety of shallow nothingness but, is, instead, an active love that fosters Black joy and resistance. Such discourse focuses on compassionate empathy, critical listening, and bearing witness to unguarded truths (hooks 2000). Our participation in this project models cathartic writing but is also pedagogical resistance and praxis (Allen 2019; Ohito 2019; Smith 2019).

Over eight weeks, we exchanged poems in phone calls, texts, and emails. Our poems connected us even though we were geographically separated. By delving into well-crafted lines, we explored the traumas and triumphs of our lives, and although the truths often hurt, poetry allowed us to (re)member (see Dillard 2012), reaffirm, and reclaim our inner selves as Venus Evans-Winters (2019), Monique Morris (2016), and I, Dywanne Smith, (2019) have advocated. Through call-and-response poetics, we created a discursive and disruptive space in which to share and bear witness to our lived realities. In this manner, our poems are what Sarojini Nadar (2014) calls counternarrative **STORYs** that **S**uspect and challenge dominant narratives of knowledge, are **T**ools of knowledge gathering and dissemination, unequivocally **O**bject to the objectification of the Black female form,

Re-envision Black girl and womanhood, and Yearn for and work toward transformational change.

I begin this article by examining the use of ethnopoetics as Black feminist/womanist research methodology, as describing truths of Black girlhood and womanhood, and as offering insights into how poetry can be used as an instrument to confront trauma, deepen critical consciousness, and bestow a healing love.

Ethnopoetics as Feminist/Womanist Research Methodology

Appealing to our humanity, poetic inquiry is a deconstructive tool that affords a new way of representing knowledge and is itself sociopolitical praxis (Faulkner 2019). Ethnopoetics is an artform existing in all cultures; it includes chants, prayers, hymns, poems, songs, and praises (Nielsen 1997). Ethnopoems and poetry have long been a manifestation of Black cultural and literary expression (Browne 2020; Golden 2018; Grant et al. 2016).

To many, the juxtaposition of poetry and research may seem awkward. Poetry lends itself to beauty and aesthetics, and at first glance, it does not appear to be an appropriate tool to interpret the political world of educational research. Yet, it is exactly this creative aesthetic that makes poetry fertile ground for a qualitative study. Lesley Saunders (2003) suggests that poetry has six specific functions: “it presents rather than argues; offers insight; adds to the sense of the world’s variety; offers a space to play with ideas; makes new of the mundane; and connects the seemingly unconnected as a way to awaken memory” (176). Poetry, when drenched with Black feminist/womanist thought, reveals an inherent and qualitative research power to illuminate the stories of Black girls and women.

For Black girls and women, what is enacted in traditional scientific research also plays out in a traditional school environment. For Black female girlhood and womanhood, there is nothing sacred or off-limits; all aspects are subjected to public scrutiny, exhibition, and derisive judgment (Love 2019; Morris 2016, 2019). Kimberly Wallace-Sanders (2002) called this issue of representation body drama, arguing that being Black and female is characterized by the private being made public thus making Black women hypervisible as a racist society objectifies and commodifies their beauty, hair, curves, flow, and style, and also (hyper)invisible because it denies Black girls and women’s stories, struggles, celebrations, and growth (Evans-Winters 2019; Morris 2016; Smith 2019). Such actions serve only to marginalize

Black girls and women's individual and collective humanity (Morris 2019; Muhammad and Haddix 2016; Price-Dennis 2016; Smith 2019).

Evans-Winters (2019) asserts that Black girls' and women's truths and identities, like their memories and stories, must be represented "EXPO-NENTIAL[ly, requiring]... [m]ulti-vocular, interdisciplinary, transdisciplinary, and dialectical theories, methodologies and pedagogies" (85). Black girlhood and womanhood must be viewed through an explosion of experiences and representations that can come only from research, classrooms, and society centering the stories of Black girls and women (McArthur and Muhammad 2020; Morris 2019; Muhammad and Haddix 2016). Researchers, theorists, and educators must flood their respective places with textual artifacts, be they literary, informational, visual, or musical. Black girls must read and analyze the likes of June Jordan, Lois Mailou Jones, Gwendolyn Brooks, Chimamanda Adichie, Nayyirah Waheed, Alice Walker, Maya Angelou, Jennifer Hudson, Beyoncé, Megan Thee Stallion, and Reyna Noriega. Also, Black girls must learn from the grandmothers, mothers, other mothers, and *sista* friends since these are the storied lives that will awaken, enrich, and sustain.

As a methodological research tool, poetry maintains a special place in which Black women can express affective experiences, specifically the intersectionalities of those experiences, and provide social commentary on being Black and being a woman in a hostile, racist, and patriarchal environment (Cooper 2018; Harris-Perry 2014; Nash 2011). This critical perspective allows Black girls' and women's stories to be used as data to discover new pathways to liberation. Through poetic enterprise, Black female authors have claimed authority and agency over the representations of their race, gender, intellect, sexualities, beauty, hope, and love (Collins 2002; Lorde 1984). Ethnopoetics permits an author to communicate something ultimately nameless and/or often indescribable thus allowing researchers to move beyond the limitations of traditional discursive research (Faulkner 2019; Smith 2019).

Poetry holds a unique position for Black girls and women. It is a mirror casting an illuminating love in which Black girlhood exists in melanin and magic (Browne 2016). As a resistance platform, ethnopoetics asserts poetry as a truth-bearing and deconstructive tool that challenges the idea of so-called normality because for there to be a normal, an Other must exist (Collins 2002). Poetry helps magnify the beauty, intelligence, and strength that Black girls and women naturally exude. For this reason, Audre Lorde (1984) declares that poetry could not be a luxury for Black girls and women. Instead, it must be a repository of wisdom and possibility. She says,

It [poetry] is a vital necessity of our existence ... [p]oetry is the way we help give name to the nameless so it can be thought. The farthest horizons of our hopes and fears are cobbled by our poems, carved from the rock experiences of our daily lives.

As they become known to and accepted by us, our feelings and the honest exploration of them become sanctuaries and spawning grounds for the most radical and daring of ideas. They become a safe-house for that difference so necessary to change and the conceptualization of any meaningful action. (37–38)

Poetry is comfort and warmth. It is resistance and rebellion. It is inspiration and possibility. It is sanctuary and love. To challenge dominant opinion and prevent self-hatred, Black female authors have invoked the poetic genre as a counternarrative to affirm what is often only devalued and demeaned (Saavedra and Pérez 2012; Smith 2019).

Poetry has long delved into the politics of personhood for Black girls and women. A call-and-response has existed across space and time to provide testament that self-actualization is achieved by embracing self-definition, self-validation, experiential knowledge, and the clapback theory embedded in Black feminism/womanism (Collins 2002; Cooper et al. 2017; Kendall 2020; Lorde 1984). Phillis Wheatley (1773) elucidates the emotional dissonance of the demands of being asked to write about freedom while still enslaved. In “Jim Crow: The Sequel,” June Jordan (2016) proudly situates herself as “[a]n angry Black woman [responding to] the angry White man” (107) and expounds on enslavement’s permutations by re-emphasizing that “[j]ustice don’t mean nothing to a hateful heart!” (108). Lucille Clifton’s (1980) “homage to my hips” begins by unapologetically declaring,

these hips are big hips
they need space to
move around in.
they don’t fit into little
petty places. these hips
are free hips. (52)

Not only does the rhythm of the poem mimic the swaying of a woman’s hips, but Clifton also revels in the fact that her natural God-given curves need space in which to move. Flash-forwarding forty years, Megan Thee Stallion and Beyoncé (2020) echo the sentiment by saying, “If you don’t jump to put jeans on, baby, / you don’t feel my pain.” In and of itself, this song, “Savage (Remix),” conveys a modern version of Maya Angelou’s (1978) poem “Phenomenal Woman” by displaying how the Black female inner selves can be “Classy, bougie, ratchet / Sassy, moody, nasty” (Megan Thee Stallion and Beyoncé 2020) simultaneously. Black female writers have

used poetry to celebrate and analyze their bodies as experiential knowledge and to enact and perform their literary lives. Poetry reaffirms liberation, and empowerment can come only with self-love and affirmation. The poetic words provide “prolific multi-layered space that exists as a guidebook for survival, methodology, and conversation” (Hines 2017: para. 1).

For Wynn and me, poetry also has a personal connection; it is our heart language. When our realities became too harsh, we took sanctuary in poetry. When work, school, families, or love lives became overwhelming, we used poetry to think about and vocalize our fears. It is the first place to which we go to seek advice and our most profound way of knowing. Through poetry, our present Black women selves converse with the Black girls in our past, creating a dialogic space to foster a healing communion. Traditional research methodologists would argue that poems must accompany prose filled with the explanation of its creation and what it means, but as my grandmother would say, “Baby, this ain’t that world.” In this resistive space, we present our poetry without commentary because America’s imperialistic, colonizing, and supremacist constructs have done enough to interrupt and disrupt the lives of Black girls and women.

The poems are a verse novel or a narrative story that uses the poetic form. I offer the novel’s structure to prepare the heart and mind of the imaginative novice reader. For critical and humanizing research to be successful and adequately inform educators’ pedagogical and curricular practices, researchers must have a clear understanding of what transpires in students’ hearts and minds (Evans-Winters 2019). The verse novel provides an opportunity to communicate Black girls’ and women’s feelings and experiences to researchers and educators in accessible ways.

Benefit **Explication**

Verse novels serve as cultural mirrors.	Verse novels mirror a culture’s art, music, and literary heritage while merging rhythm and melody (Faulkner, 2019).
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Verse novels blend multiple modalities.	Combining artistry, the printed word, and orality, verse novels celebrate performance, storytelling, verve, and communion (Browne 2020; Johnson, Boutte et al. 2019).
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Verse novels are innovative ways to build on the Black literary tradition.	Black authors have embraced and excelled in creating verse novels. Jacqueline Woodson’s (2014) <i>Brown Girl Dreaming</i> , Walter Dean Myers’s (2006) <i>Street Love</i> , and Kwame Alexander’s (2014) <i>The Crossover</i> won numerous awards for their compelling characters and gripping plots.
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By combining the creative use of pauses, line breaks, word choice, and positioning, the verse novel has the potential to bring what was once hidden to light, producing the hesitation necessary for reflection and action. We know wholeheartedly that the verse novel does not comply with the structure of research journals for it may attempt to dictate formatting, but it cannot restrict the fullness of Black girlhood. The reader will transact with an amalgamation of images, stanzas, and spaces. If, as a reader, you become confused, reread. Black girls' and women's lives are worth more than a cursory glance. If you, as a reader, want explicit directions, know that we understand. We, too, sought a detailed instruction manual to navigate the labyrinth of white supremacy and racism. Reading this short novel will be a daunting journey, but it mirrors the struggles of sojourning from Black girlhood to womanhood.

The verse novel begins with a collaborative contextualization poem created by weaving together our candid responses to each other's poetry. We searched for and harvested the words that resonated, and we combined them to provide an introduction into our insights. The novel continues with Wynn's girlhood reflection and concludes with mine. This structure remains until we discuss the themes of sexual trauma, love, and transformation. We selected these themes together because, good or bad, we felt that they are representative of what many Black girls experience. Our lives are composites of joy and sadness. Wynn and I both agreed that it was necessary to discuss our sexual assaults because many times that violence is, as Toni Morrison says in *The Bluest Eye* (1970), as "[q]uiet as it's kept" (1). This purposeful omission

leaves Black girls relatively unprotected from the *pattern* of violence that they experience . . . This vulnerability opens a door for others to treat their marginalization as a creation of Black girls' own making, their truths obscured as entertainment (Morris 2019: 4, emphasis in original).

We proudly assert that our being assaulted was never our fault and that such assaults are indicative of the need to protect Black girls at all costs and at all times.

The spaces between the poems are to allow the reader's body time to breathe, grieve, celebrate, and ponder. Wynn and I respectfully ask that you enter this text with a compassionate love because, as bell hooks (2000) asserts, "To be loving, we willingly hear the other's truth, and most importantly, we affirm the value of truth telling. Lies may make people feel better, but they do not help them to know love" (95) or bear witness to Black girlhood.

Stolen Childhood, Stolen Innocence: A Collaborative Poem

You never viewed my body as my own.
You tried to lay waste to it.
You put your hands on my body,
while choking my throat.
I can barely breathe,
let alone scream.
With swift maneuvers,
you violate and leave me
Feeling tarnished.
Feeling hopeless.
Feeling as if I'm all wrong.
And you did it while knowing
I was an adolescent.
Not a kid,
but still not grown.
Where was my protection
as my childhood
and innocence were stolen?

Wynn's Reflection: If My Mirror Could Talk

If my mirror could talk,
it would say a multitude.
My mirror would say that
she sees a girl scared,
and a young woman, yet so brave.
My mirror would say that
she sees a resilient,
beautiful and strong
young woman.
But . . .
my mirror would also ask
a lot of questions.
My mirror would wonder,
How can someone so beautiful
go so long not seeing her truth?
What could make her question her worth?
Who could make her feel less than enough?
What could make her feel as if
she does not matter?
My mirror sees my totality.
Peering into my soul,
from every angle,
inside and out.
It sees the true me.
The one society ignores.

Am I not love?
Yes!
Yes!
Yes, I am.
I push the negative thoughts
out of my mind.
I focus only on
what my mirror shows me.
I don't wish to dwell on the insecurities
and pain that try to shape how I see myself.
I try not to think of the men who tainted
my reflection.
Today,
after all these years,
when I look in my mirror,
I feel like I'm in a new body.
One that was never
neglected or doubted.
Despite the years of abuse,
and all the people who have tried
to control my body . . .
now I have complete authority,
and they will never
take it away from me again.

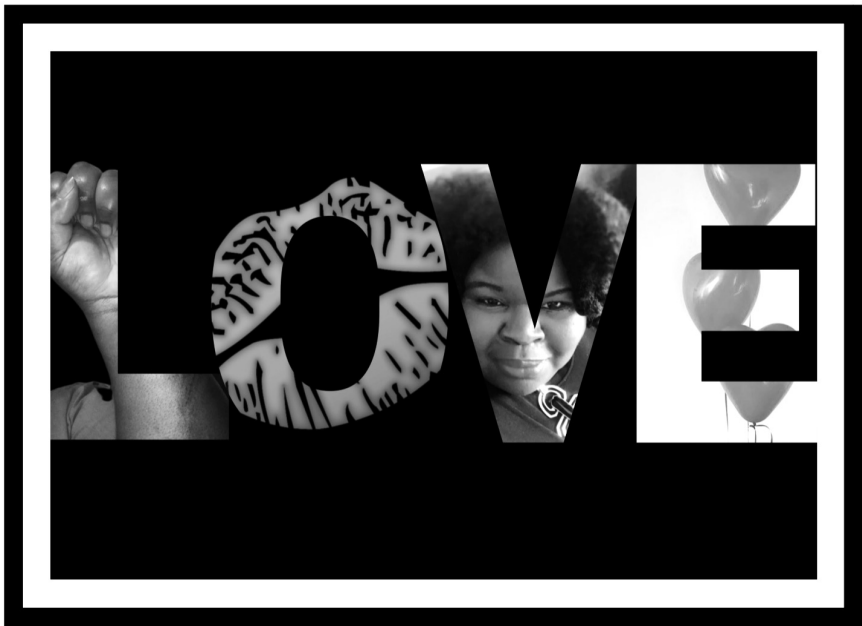
Dywanna's Reflection: Poem for the Black Girl inside Me

Every time I peer
into a mirror,
I see you
standing beside me.
I am hugging you.
I am loving you.
I am cherishing you
because you deserve it.
This assault . . .
This brutal violation
is not your fault.
Baby girl, look at me.
NO!
LOOK AT ME!
My love, this is not your fault.
You are still beautiful.
You are still magic.
You are still whole.
He tried to break your spirit,
not realizing that you
were born and transformed

by blood.
You cleansed me.
You carried me.
You loved me.
You assured me.
I owe my present self
to you,
and together we will craft
a future grounded in
unapologetic Black love.

The Depths of Love: A Visual Collaborative Poem

Figure 1. Love Visual Poem Personal photograph by Dywanna Smith with combined images purchased from Shutterstock



Wynn's Reflection: Cravings (Unedited)

There are moments when I have cravings.
 Mysterious, out-of-the-blue cravings.
 Sometimes, it's chocolate.
 The thought of the richness,
 Sweet, melty, the silkiness of chocolate.
 There is something bizarre
 about how a simple piece of food
 can change your mood.
 Make you happy to make you whole.
 It fills the void of what I am missing.
 In the moment,
 I am craving something new.
 I'm craving you.
 I'm craving your touch.
 I miss the warmth you bring me.
 The butterflies are forming, and
 they have no intention of leaving.
 And you know what?
 I wouldn't have it any other way.
 You remind me to smile
 bigger and brighter.
 You bring back the light.
 You help keep me from sinking
 in the sea of my mind.
 Every day I thank God
 for introducing me to you
 and for keeping you in my life.
 I guess what I'm saying is
 I'm craving the love you give me.
 I'm craving the feelings you give me.
 Simply put . . .
 I'm craving you

Dywanna's Reflection: Love's Shadow

You're a shadow.
 Memories of you linger.
 I catch glimpses of you,
 walking up the steps,
 foraging in the kitchen,
 feeling your weight lying in bed.
 Soft caresses,
 hands on my body,
 laughter reverberating
 through the room.
 You're a ghost.
 A recollection

of possibilities denied.
The truth that I'll never
see you again
weighs on my spirit.
Dark thoughts hold me captive.
To free myself, I must remember
Love doesn't linger in pain.
Love doesn't ignore.
My heart wrenches
as I say goodbye to dreams.
Growing with you.
Jokes with you.
Those dreams now fester,
trying to destroy me
from the inside.
Another night alone
makes me realize
You are not mine.
You never were.
You were just a specter
posing as reality.
So I choose to love myself more.
Love me enough to
walk away from the
relics of a relationship.
One which started
with so much promise
but ended
in a river of tears.

Transformation: A Collaborative Poem

At first,
a blank canvas.
Now, a
masterpiece
in living color.
Blending
the bold hues of Faith Ringgold
with the sultry, earthy tone of Elizabeth Catlett,
adding the photography of April Bey
to the abstractions of Alma Thomas.
They combine and change
until I am mixed-media perfection:
Artwork now transformed.

Wynn's Reflection: Black Girl Flying (Excerpt)

Tonight the sky
has never looked so beautiful.
Not a cloud in sight and
just enough stars to
let you know you aren't alone.
I wonder what it would like to touch the sky
and live among the planets.
To lie on clouds.
Planes don't get you close enough.
No, see, I want to fly with my wings.
Let the wind take me away from here.
Take me away from the darkness.
I wanna feel weightless.
I wanna feel free.
Tonight, I'm gonna fly. . .
My ancestors are tugging at my feet.
So many have walked a path
harder than mine.
They want me to take flight.
I've gotta fly.
I don't see any way around it.
I've got to fly.
On the count of three: 1 . . . 2 . . . 3!
You wouldn't believe me if I told you,
but that night, I flew.
I flew past the trees,
the clouds,
the planes.
I flew so high,
I passed the sun,
and I didn't stop there.
I grew wings that night,
and I've been flying ever since.

Dywanna's Reflection: To the Ones Who Carried Me

To the ones who carried me,
Saw me standing on the edge
of the world,
peering into the dark abyss of death,
Staring enviously at the peace
I thought it would bring.
To the ones who carried me,
who grabbed me by the spirit
and pulled me into loving arms.
I can now say,
I'm grateful.

Yes, I hated your interference
at that time.
Didn't want to internalize the kindness and compassion
you gifted me.
Know that as I now stand here planted firmly in my truth,
battling my demons
by laying naked and vulnerable
in front of them.
I understand that I refused your blessings repeatedly.
For that, I say, I'm sorry.
I apologize because I saw myself
as not worthy of love,
Not worthy of your words,
Not worthy of your presence
in my life.
I was immersed and versed in
a bevy of lies that crippled me.
I wanted death like
some desire salvation.
Like some crave water.
I needed the solace of silence.
I needed to defeat heartache
and could only see . . . one way.
So to those of you who carried me,
Who courageously stood
in the wrath of my anger,
bore witness to my pain.
Sheltered me from myself.
Blanketed me with love.
Reminded me that the world
needed my body,
my voice,
my work . . .
I owe you my life.
I owe you my future.
But I can only offer this poem.
These small utterances,
scribbled feverishly
over notebook paper
that is creased
and withered
with age.
They, like me,
are imperfect.
But they, like me, are
heartfelt and true.
Take these lines as
diamonds,

rubies,
or gold.
They are but the treasures
of my mind,
and know
that I am
here because you allowed
me to bask in the
warmth of your love.

Writing Wisdom: What Poetry Can Teach Us

This writing project began generatively. There was no robust and detailed plan. It started with Wynn honestly proclaiming, “I did not think the last time I was in your office on campus would be the last time I would physically see you. This is not OK. I am not OK.” Emancipatory learning cannot occur in spaces where joy does not exist (Love 2019; Muhammad 2020). Emancipatory instruction cannot occur in spaces where love does not exist (hooks 2000; Johnson et al. 2019; Smith 2019). For Wynn to be successful in her academic endeavors and in her life, she needed a space of abundant joy and love. This act of reaching out in and of itself has a pedagogical implication.

Educators Must Center Black Girl Experiences and Literacies

As the world has awakened to the many injustices perpetrated against Black Americans, there have been numerous calls for widespread change. Movements have started to defund police forces, change policy to prohibit the use of rubber bullets and tear gas, and fund public education fully. These steps are crucial and long overdue. This same scrutiny, however, has not been given to public school curricula that have little to no representations of Black girlhood. Frequently, curricula feature the white male authors in the canon. If real change is to occur in schools, the canon must be dismantled and fortified with texts that display authentic and varied portrayals of Black girlhood. All students, not just Black girls, would benefit from reading across the pages and the lives of Black girls and women around the world. Doing so is humanizing pedagogy that allows students to bear witness to the similarities and “contradictions and then [work] through them to bring about critical, intellectually responsible thinking and action” (Morris 2019: 7) and foster a healing environment.

Educators Must Make Spaces to Examine Black Girl Intersectionalities

As Audre Lorde (2012) poignantly reminds us, “There is no such thing as a single-issue struggle because we do not lead single-issue lives” (para. 14). For this reason, educators need to read, discuss, and analyze the multitude of social identities that students bring into the classroom. Because schools in their current construct cannot be safe spaces for students of color, particularly Black girls, educators must transform to become sanctuaries, archivists of history, listeners of truths, and staunch advocates for change (Smith et al. 2021). Educators have to discuss race, gender, language, sexualities, size, age, ability, class, religion, and other social identities critically and compassionately. Educators must fully recognize that existing in different situated identities creates a multiplicative effect, placing our students’ humanities in double, triple, or quadruple jeopardy.

Educators Must Immerse Themselves in Black Girl Magic, Joy, and Resilience

In this increasing age of accountability, many educators have felt the pressure to focus more on summative test results than on forming real foundational relationships with students. Educators must recognize that knowing names and test scores is a superficial relationship. Bettina Love (2019) asserts, “As educators, we need to think of accountability beyond testing and academic achievement, and in terms of human suffering” (122). Framing accountability in this manner shifts it from being solely a focus on content and reframes it as a focus on students, content, and change. Educators must fully immerse themselves in the melanin and magic that is Black girlhood—requiring educators to study history, literary works, artistic creations, and communities of Black girls. Completing this process will be an uncomfortable road of discovery since educators will have to unlearn lies that have masqueraded as American truths. Black girls must lead this radical restructuring of the classroom so that they may model motivation, resilience, and the joy needed to achieve actualization and academic success.



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