

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

Virtual Educator Program: *The Delights of Joy vs. Happiness*

Thursday, April 16, 2020

Created by Teaching Artist: Greg Geffrard

(90 minute lesson)

LOI: While exploring the poetical essayettes of Ross Gay's *The Book of Delights: Essays*, can we shift our perspective from seeking happiness that is connected to an expectation to allowing joy to find us wherever we find ourselves?

CAPACITIES: Identifying Patterns, Noticing Deeply, Creating Meaning

MODALITY: Written Artmaking

MATERIALS:

- Viewing Device (Computer/Phone)
- Pens/Pencils
- Joy by Zadie Smith (PDF provided prior)

TODAY'S LESSON:

A few weeks into staying at home, I asked Lead Teaching Artist Greg Geffrard what he wanted to work on. He mentioned recently listening to the aired episode of ON BEING with Krista Tippet featuring Ross Gay and how it deeply resonated with this current moment. After reading Ross's *The Book of Delights: Essays* and following one essay back to its source material, the Zadie Smith piece you all received in your email, Greg built an art-making activity around this line of inquiry: **While exploring the poetical essayettes of Ross Gay's *The Book of Delights: Essays*, can we shift our perspective from seeking happiness that is connected to an expectation to allowing joy to find us wherever we find ourselves?**

Greg has not only been a teaching artist with Steppenwolf since 2015, he also was recently seen understudying in Steppenwolf productions of *BUG* (Season 19/20) and *PASS OVER* (Season 16/17). Greg began writing poetry once he realized that it offered him an imaginative way to learn his second language (English; Haitian Creole is his native tongue). After meeting and receiving the respectful nod only a mentor could bestow on an eager pupil from Idris Goodwin while they were both in grad school at the University of Iowa, he began to build his catalog of poetic works. His greatest joy comes from working with youth in search of amplifying their voice and has been a coach for Louder Than A Bomb since 2015 at several CPS schools. He is also a sexual assault prevention educator and his life objective is to humanize marginalized groups for you cannot empathized with those whose humanity has not been acknowledged. If he were to get a tattoo, it would read: Black Boy Joy!
Ya'll enough from me, here is Greg!

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

LESSON STEPS

STEP ONE: Introduction & Breathing Warm-Up (10 minutes)

- “You cannot accomplish your way out of this pandemic”
 - Explore the difference between “seeking happiness” and “allowing joy to find you” and what we seek to do during the workshop
 - Share that essay, since we’ll be explore essays today, means “to try” in French and that’s all we are aiming to do today
 - **In the chat:** What do you see as the difference between seeking happiness and allowing joy?
- Invite educators to be guided through a breathing warm-up.
 - How do you allow yourself space for just you during these moments? Is breathing the only thing you require at this moment?
 - Guided inhales and exhales, focusing on body and breath

STEP TWO: 10-word poems (15 minutes)

- We will listen to #2 *Inefficiency* by Ross Gay from his *The Book of Delights: Essays* while also having a slide with the text of the essay (4 minutes long)
 - As you listen: What words resonate with you in relation to where you find yourself currently (emotionally, physically, spiritually or literally)? **Amanda put in chat**
 - Jot down these words.
- Utilizing the words found in this essayette, each of us will create a 10-word poem
- Keeping this quote in mind, I encourage writers to step away from their computer (“...any technology that slows us down in our writing rather than speeding us up is the one we ought to use” - Susan Sontag **Amanda put in chat**) and write their poems in a notebook
 - Taking a momentary break from the devices we have been relegated to these past couple of weeks!!
- The instructions for creating your 10-word poems are as follows:
 1. You can only use 10 words
 2. You can repeat the words as many times as you like (and change their tense)
 3. Focus on how much you can create whole worlds using only a few choice words
 4. Surprise yourself and delight in the fact that there is no right/wrong when creating your personal truths
- Greg share model poem
- You will have 8 minutes, we will count down on the screen, please come back when we have 1 minute left!!

STEP THREE: Sharing and Reflection (5 minutes)

- Reflection on the first poem writing task.

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

- Please out your answers in the chat to these reflection questions. We will unmute 1-2 individuals that want to share publicly, they should use the RAISE HAND button.
 - Our reflective, guided questions:
 - *What were some challenges you encountered?*
 - *What preconceived notions were you able to release?*
 - *What is something that surprised you?***Amanda put in chat**
- A Zadie Smith quote as a final offering:
 - *“The thing no one ever tells you about joy is that it has very little real pleasure in it. And yet if it hasn't happened at all at least once, how would we live?” -Zadie Smith* **Amanda put in chat**

STEP FOUR: Listening To 14. Joy Is Such A Human Madness Essayette Snippet (10 minutes)

- The group will listen to *Joy Is Such A Human Mess*, as you do:
 - *Make note of the moments of when he shifts his focus from his inner life to his outer life; shifts his focus from his past to his present.*
 - *How are these different perspectives in conversation with each other? When are they existing on their own?*
 - *Is happiness a “difficult emotion to manage?”***Amanda put in chat**
- After we have listened to the essay excerpts, revisit these questions and **invite noticings in the chat**

STEP FIVE: Creating Our Delight Poems (20 minutes)

- Share this Zadie Smith quote as a jumping off point: *“Until quite recently, I had known joy only five times in my life, perhaps six and each time I tried to forget it soon after it happened, out of the fear that the memory of it would dement and destroy everything else.” -excerpt from Joy by Zadie Smith* **Amanda put in chat**
- Reflect on the poem we just heard while delving into unexplored territories of your joy within your living space or wherever you find themselves currently (being mindful that some may have more freedom of movement / autonomy than others). Still encourage participants to write offline.
- A series of questions to serve as inspiration for your to write your own poem, essay, or anything in between:
 - *What are the delights around you that have captured your attention in the current moment?*
 - *Is there something that has happened in the past couple of days that is still resonating with you in this moment (family & friends over the holiday weekend)? Were there any birthdays that have recently passed or are upcoming that have you reimagining what celebration may look like?*

STEPPENWOLF EDUCATION

- *Is there an item that transports you to a nostalgic space that musings in this present moment?*
- Greg share model poem
- You will have 15 minutes, we will count down on the screen, please come back when we have 1 minute left!!

STEP SIX: Sharing and Reflection: (10 minutes)

- As we gather back together we would like to invite a few folx to share a bit from either of their pieces
- What questions do you have about today's workshop?

STEP SEVEN: Our Final Delights (20 minutes)

- A quote to kick off our final delights: *"connection is the gift unearthed during a violent awakening" (such as a pandemic)*
- Welcome Ross Gay into the conversation: Amanda will introduce.
 - Greg - *invite one person to share how Ross's work has inspired their work by sharing one of their pieces from this workshop*
- Quick Q & A
 - *Ross: How have you been navigating these times as a finder of daily delights and do you have any thoughts/musings for your fellow educators during these times?*
 - *Invite Ross to ask questions if he has any and remember to thank him for his time and for the gift of sharing his life with us through words.*

Thanks for all your great work!