

Education & Activity Guide

phlassembled.net
[#phlassembled](https://twitter.com/phlassembled)
[#movement](https://twitter.com/movement)



Introduction	3
What is <i>Philadelphia Assembled</i> ?	5
Reconstructions	7
Sovereignty	13
Futures	21
Sanctuary	29
In the Henceforward...	36

Introduction

"I know of nothing more important, more difficult, and more purely loving than the nurture of children, be it as a parent, a teacher, or as an artist wishing to serve them well. Children are the ways that the world begins again and again. If you fasten upon that concept of their promise, you will have trouble finding anything more awesome, and also anything more extraordinarily exhilarating, than the opportunity or/and the obligation to nurture a child into his or her own freedom...and I want these things for children, because I want these things for myself, and for all of us, because unless we embody these attitudes and precepts as the governing rules of our love, and of our political commitment to survive, we will love in vain, and we will certainly not survive."

—June Jordan

I believe that teaching is an art. At its best, a sacred art, a sacred responsibility. Audre Lorde offers, "I know teaching is a survival technique. It is for me, and I think it is in general; and that's the only way real teaching, real learning, happens." In this *Philadelphia Assembled* project, many of our collaborators seek to interrogate collective histories of resistance and imbue the 215 with *el arte de la frontera*, as Gloria Anzaldúa writes—art practices that embody resistance, rupture, and self-transformation—unsettling colonial imaginations to soar toward true freedom.

Through this guide, we hope that those who it touches can find entry points into the worlds

of *Philadelphia Assembled*. The activities included within don't pretend to be exhaustive or comprehensive of the many different themes, issues, and histories that can be found throughout the exhibition, yet we do see them as powerful journey-starters. Through focusing on the questions, we expect more gradual responses and actions to emerge. Our hope is that you do extend what we have here to fit your own context. Please make it your own, and share enthusiastically.

We intend to make room for a future not yet here. We intend to make space for our survival.

—Christopher Rogers,
Philadelphia Assembled collaborator



Philadelphia Assembled

Philadelphia Assembled is an expansive project that tells a story of radical community building and active resistance through the personal and collective narratives that make up Philadelphia's changing landscape. These narratives are explored through a collaborative effort initiated by artist Jeanne van Heeswijk in collaboration with the Philadelphia Museum of Art and a team of individuals, collectives, and organizations as they experiment with multiple methodologies for amplifying and connecting relationships across the city and articulating some of its most urgent issues.

Within this project, these concerns are organized around five subjects, or what we term "atmospheres" and their corresponding questions: What histories can be rewritten (**Reconstructions**), what resources can be shared (**Sovereignty**), what futures can be imagined (**Futures**), what asylum can be offered (**Sanctuary**), and how can we disseminate our collective learning (**Movement**)?

Challenging, inspiring, and as big as the city, *Philadelphia Assembled* asks: how can we collectively shape our futures?

Photo: Joseph Hu, Philadelphia Museum of Art



Reconstructions

Rising out of the ashes of damage and neglect, reconstructions do not search for a former authenticity, but hold a complex identity that encompasses past and present. They are (re)claimed, (re)built, (re)written, and (re)worked. The Reconstructions atmosphere is specifically focusing its efforts on identifying spaces that speak to rewriting personal and collective narratives through the lenses of mass incarceration and displacement. Collaborators in Reconstructions are looking to explore home, healing, and trauma in relation to incarceration, reentry, gentrification, and displacement as lived realities within a changing Philadelphia.

What Does Freedom Mean to You?

Denise Valentine, a member of the *Philadelphia Assembled* artistic team, and editor of the Reconstructions atmosphere: "Freedom to me is the ability to tell our own story, as an individual and as a community. There is an African proverb that says, 'As long as the hunter tells the story, he will always win.' For so long we have accepted someone else's version of our stories and what they chose to omit, what they chose to distort. My life's work has been an effort to not only reclaim those stories, but also rewrite them, and to empower other people with the skills and the techniques to hold the stories of the community. I like to create story-holders: I share what I have learned and help other people become the holders and the tellers of those stories as well."

William Goldsby, founder/chair of Reconstruction Inc.: "Freedom to me is the ability to think without restriction, refinement, or hesitation and being able to channel our thinking into a way to release how we have been colonized by those who have controlled the narrative. We are conditioned by the colonization of Africa (twice); we are conditioned by the names of the calendar year. Freedom means being able to rise above that condition and begin to re-define and rethink who we are as human, and not perpetuate the narrative that has been more oppressive than liberated. That's the broader sense of freedom in my thinking."

Reflection

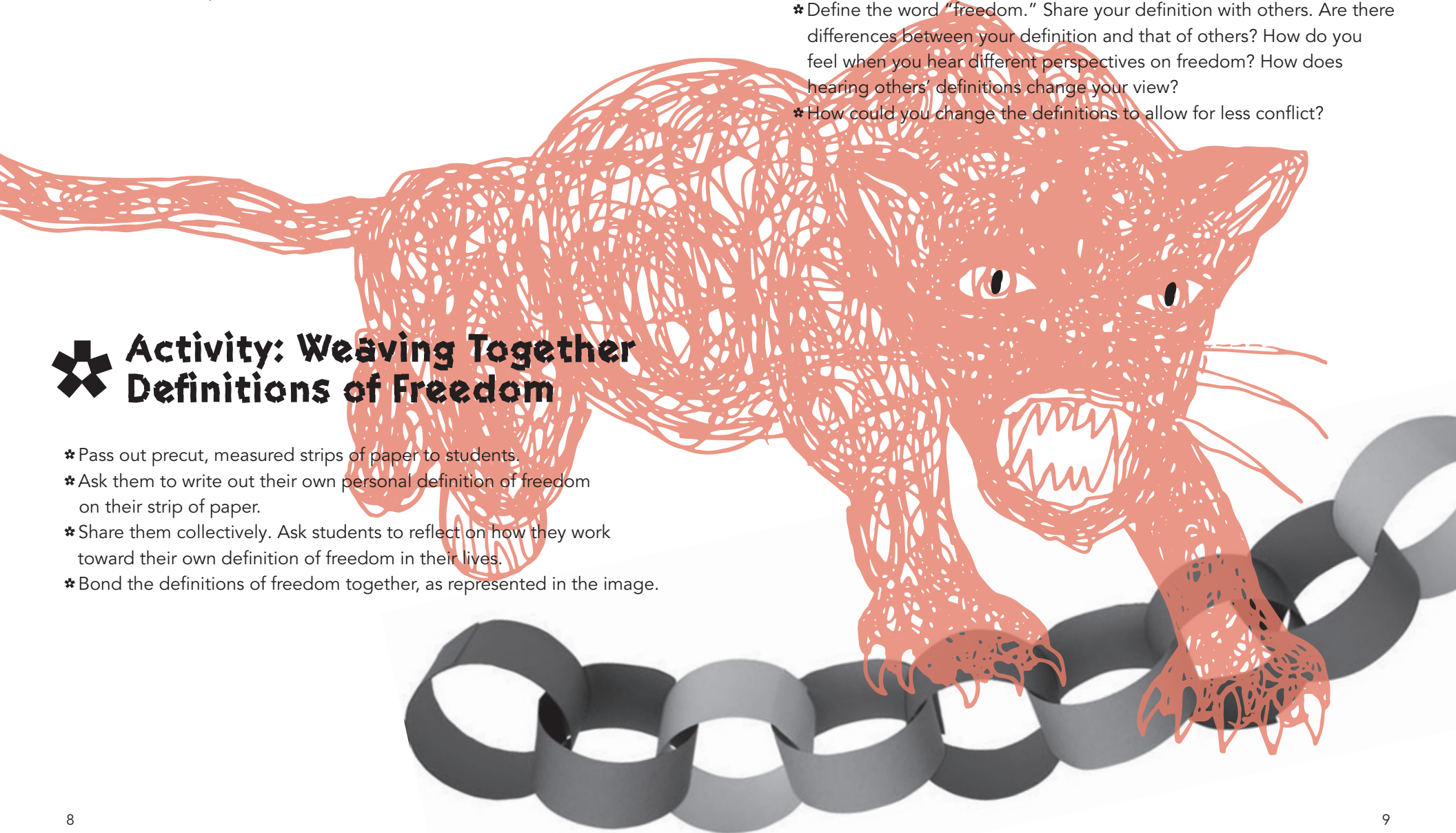
- * Freedom is a hard word to define. These are just two examples. What are the threads that bring these two personal definitions together?
- * How do Denise Valentine's and William Goldsby's definitions of freedom show up in the work that they do?

Reflection

- * How is one person's freedom shared and interconnected with the freedom of others?
- * Can one person's freedom restrict or constrain another person's freedom? How might that show up in the world?
- * Define the word "freedom." Share your definition with others. Are there differences between your definition and that of others? How do you feel when you hear different perspectives on freedom? How does hearing others' definitions change your view?
- * How could you change the definitions to allow for less conflict?

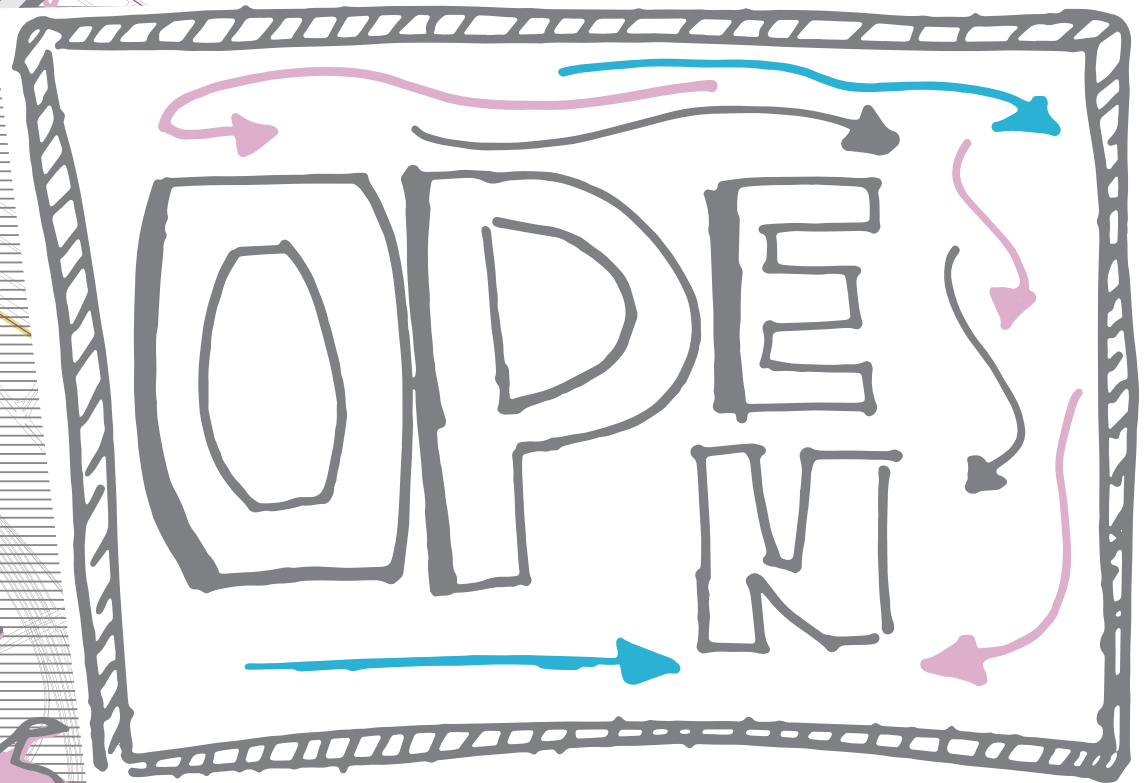
Activity: Weaving Together Definitions of Freedom

- * Pass out precut, measured strips of paper to students.
- * Ask them to write out their own personal definition of freedom on their strip of paper.
- * Share them collectively. Ask students to reflect on how they work toward their own definition of freedom in their lives.
- * Bond the definitions of freedom together, as represented in the image.



Sovereignty

Within *Philadelphia Assembled*, sovereignty is understood and revealed through layered questions about autonomy, equity, and freedom. Through these questions, the Sovereignty atmosphere seeks to address the specific concepts of land and the alternative marketplace as each relates to histories of self-determination, the preservation of community wisdom, and new forms of cultural exchange. These ideas are being explored, together, from within a context of what author bell hooks terms “communities of resistance,” spaces that “can emerge around our struggles for personal self-recovery as well as our efforts to organize collectively.” Some collaborators took inspiration from the rich history of the 52nd Street business corridor in West Philadelphia as a model of economic sovereignty.



52nd Street

From horse and carriages to luxury SUVs, 52nd Street has been West Philadelphia's "main street" for over a century. "The Duece," as the street is also known, has been the setting for vaudeville theaters, dynamic Jewish enterprises, and the Radical Black Arts Movement. Economic booms and busts can be seen in the buildings located along the street. For instance, the current Bushfire Theatre of Performing Arts was established as the Locust Theater in 1914. The theater held vaudeville performances and by the 1930s was a movie theater, complete with a large Art Deco marquee. By the mid-1970s, the theater sat vacant. That is, until West Philadelphia native Al Simpkins purchased the building and founded the Bushfire Theatre.

The theater initiated its forty-year tradition as a center of Black and African diasporic narratives. Stars like Loretta Devine and Morgan Freeman have attended the theater, while countless actors received their first professional gigs on its stage. These hidden gems are found throughout 52nd Street. For example, Dynamite Pest Control has been both Black-owned and family-run for over forty years and had a cameo in

a classic Blaxploitation film called *Trick Baby*. On the north end of 52nd Street, an impressive eight-story marble and white stone building has held everything from jazz clubs to municipal space and banks. One of the most impressive hidden treasures is the African Cultural Art Forum (ACAF), located at 52nd and Chancellor Streets. This building once housed a jazz club that showcased the likes of John Coltrane. It is covered by impressive and richly colored murals of historic Black leaders. Inside the space is raw but brimming with priceless pieces of art and natural body products. It is also home to a wholesale incense manufacturing arm. Outside, the streets are filled with new vending kiosks that have replaced the plucky tables that once turned the street into what resembled a bazaar. For at least half of its history, 52nd Street has been a center for enterprising Black-owned businesses that have held and polished what had been divested. The journey continues as the street now faces additional pressures with increasing gentrification. Yet, what remains constant over the past century is that 52nd Street will continue to be dynamic and filled with human treasures.

—Tempest Carter,
52nd Street Corridor Manager
at The Enterprise Center

Reflection

- * Look at the different types of businesses represented within the narrative. What does that say about what the community treasures? What values do they suggest? How do they fit into the ability to sustain and/or preserve community?
- * Singular written stories can never wholly represent a place. After reading the narrative, what's missing from this story? Where are the blank spots? Who and/or what is not here in this narrative? How could you extend the story to include what you found?

Activity: Aspects of Sovereignty Found Poems

Philadelphia Assembled collaborator Amanda Spitfire identified several aspects of “sovereignty” that she mindfully and presently attempts to manifest in her work and life. These include:

Self-governance. Community. Solidarity. Autonomy. Support. Being seen. Being heard. Taking back things that have been taken from you. Protection. Reclaiming, reasserting, or strengthening the capacity and necessity of physical, mental, emotional, energetic, and spiritual health. Control and power over health, wellness, home, land, food. Strategizing for freedoms to walk through the world as we are without being targeted, stigmatized, or infringed upon for who we are.

Based on these aspects of sovereignty, create a “found poem”:

- * Choose one or two aspects of sovereignty from Amanda’s above list.
- * Choose no more than 10 words from the 52nd Street narrative.
- * Arrange the words in 3 lines to create a list poem that reflects your chosen aspect of sovereignty.
- * Share your poem with friends and discuss how similar or different they are.
- * Choose a different aspect of sovereignty and follow the steps above to create a second poem.

Here is an example:

Chosen aspect of sovereignty
Reclaiming

Found poem
booms and busts established
countless hidden treasures
covered by history



Futures

The Futures atmosphere is thinking collectively about how to embody and present multiple visions of the future at a time when our futures (*nuestros futuros*) are already here, performing and disintegrating within our lives and environments. Within this context, collaborators ask, “How are we reclaiming the past in order to decolonize the future?” This atmosphere draws from anticolonial and neocolonial work to propose, model, and amplify many futures in Philadelphia, across time and space.

The Futures collaborators used the model of a “planning meeting” as a way to gather together and imagine multiple, speculative visions for the future. They asked, “What does it look like to reclaim the past? Whose pasts are we reclaiming? What are the ways in which we are actively participating in the decolonization of time, space, and our minds?” Take a look at this document on page 22 that was generated during one such planning meeting:

SPECULATIVE FUTURES EXERCISE

Ideas, Themes, Sentiments, Spaces, and People

Rethinking Inclusion and Working Together

Decolonizing Time and Space, Our Futures

Rebuilding the Past, Rebuilding the Future

Rethinking Storytelling and tools for education

Genocides/holocausts in our times...

(by Chris Rogers, during 3rd meetup)

Rethinking Parenting, Family, Community

Rebuilding and Rethinking Peace, Restitution, Healing, History and Intercultures

Anti-Colonial...Community Peace Making

Rename "America" + Landmarks of Black People and

Indigenous Historical site... (By Erica Mines, during 3rd meetup)

Rethinking Community Building with our communities and/or in alliance... + Reconsidering the History, Land/Ecology and Contemporary grassroots influences in Philadelphia

Possible Neighborhoods...

Norris Sq./Kensington

Germantown Ave. & Erie Ave./Nicetown

West Philly...(more specific: _____)

Others

Communities: Native Americans', Puertorrican Americans', African/African-Americans', Asian Americans', Euro-Americans', PAN-Americans', PAN-Africans, PAN-Asian...etc...

Rethinking Environmental, Racial & Social Justice with Economic Justice:

Poverty, Health, Education, Incarceration,

Employment and Small Businesses/Cooperatives

Necklace/Story/Native American child...

(By Ron Whyte, during 2nd meetup)

Rethinking the Technological, Scientific, Cultural, Artistic, Socio-Ecological, Land-Use Devide

Philadelphia

Urban Farming and Re-Greening

Media Tech/Open Access/Information Technology/

Communication/Cybernetics/Networked Culture

Rethinking the Philadelphia Museum of Art and the City

Its Colonial History

Its capacity to build alliances to support the Cultural, Artistic

Community and Economics of our own Neighborhoods

Anything /All as Art...ex:food, gardens...etc

NOTE: This list will grow as existing organizations and individuals join us and/or are interested in sharing speculations visions of te futures in community.

Reflection

- * What words and ideas are expressed? What words and ideas resonate with you?
- * How did these collaborators define words like "rethinking" and "rebuilding" in relation to a mission of decolonization?
- * What do you see that you didn't expect? What was confusing? Exciting?
- * What questions does it raise?



Activity: Join a Futures Planning Meeting

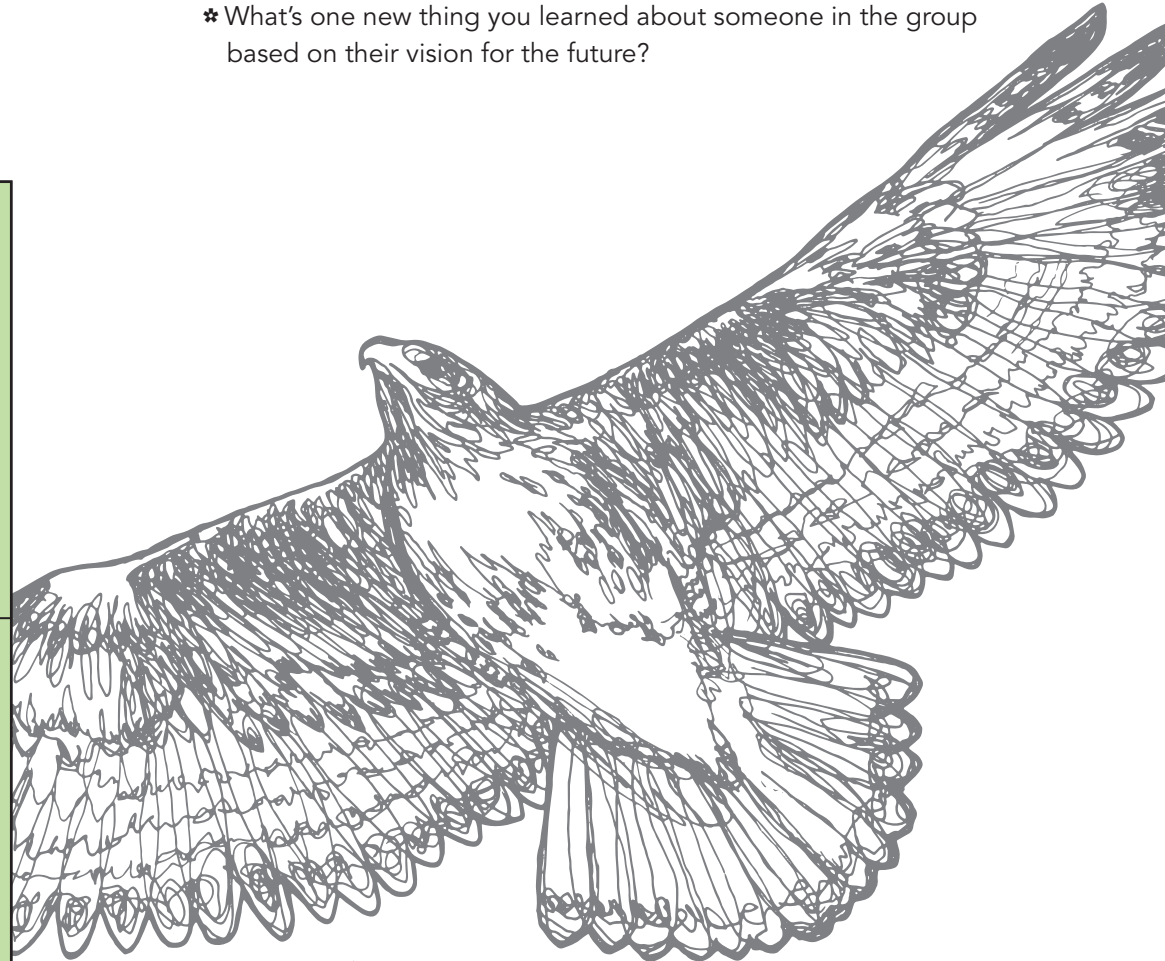
This icebreaker activity and its prompted questions were used at a Futures collaborator meeting. It's a primary way in which many of the Futures collaborators found entrance into the group. Try it out with your peers and imagine or continue to imagine the future. This is a broad exercise and will mean different things to different people—that's the point!

Prompted by the questions below, draw, write, or outline your vision of the future

What do you hope for the future?	What do you fear or worry about for the future?
How do you see yourself in the future (5 years, 10 years, 50 years)?	How do you see Philadelphia in the future (5 years, 10 years, 50 years)?

Activity: Share your vision first in pairs, then with the larger group.

- * Do you see any overlaps?
- * Look at the vision of a future Philadelphia. How do the various visions relate? What similarities and differences do you notice
- * What's one new thing you learned about someone in the group based on their vision for the future?

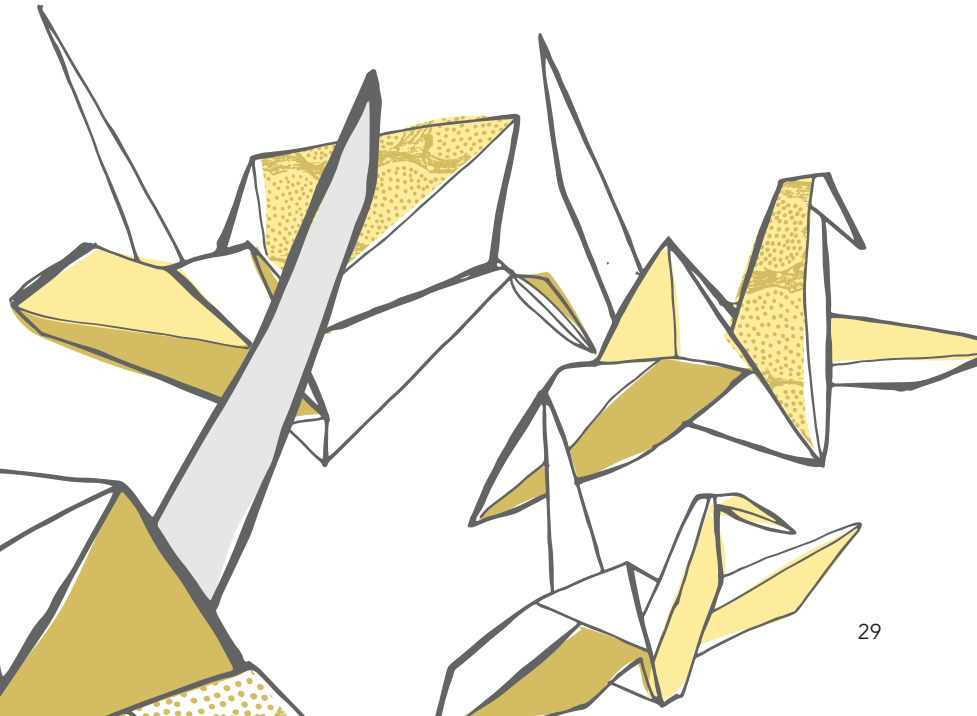




Sanctuary

The Sanctuary atmosphere concluded that there is no singular definition of sanctuary (what is sanctuary for one person might not be the same for another). As such, their activities throughout the city in spring of 2017 sought to embody a dynamic understanding of sanctuary that expresses various models of self-care, asylum, and refuge. In order to realize this site of embodied sanctuary, the Sanctuary collaborators brainstormed their notions of what an ideal safe space could look like, even if such a space only exists outside the bounds of our own immediate reality. Throughout the fall of 2017, the Sanctuary atmosphere has continued to focus on the intimate, personal ways in which individuals across the city create their own sanctuaries that help them to survive and thrive in Philadelphia.

The **Sanctuary Stewardship Program** is a project that grew out of the Sanctuary atmosphere—a working group of collaborators from within the larger *Philadelphia Assembled* project. The program's primary charge is to share essential skills across networks allow each participant to better create and steward sanctuary wherever they are. It is also there to help seed and grow cultures of sanctuary and stewardship in the world.



The Sanctuary Stewards have identified a variety of skills and tools to help promote and provide sanctuary. These include:

* **Eco-literacy and physical site stewardship.** This means engaging in a macro-to-micro exploration of the Earth as a living organism in relation to the organism of our collective body of stewards and collaborators as part of *Philadelphia Assembled*. This includes ideas of environmental care and designing spaces for ease and nurturing—something as simple as understanding how we dispose of our waste or how natural flora and fauna can enhance a gathering space for participants.

What environmental cues are important for your space? What design elements are important to bring a sense of ease and calm?

* **Facilitation.** Learn to be effective community leaders, while engaging horizontally, as a co-participant, rather than vertically, as a boss. “Meetings are the places where we build culture and trust, collaborate and generate ideas, and practice being in community with each other.” Through crafting and reinforcing a set of community agreements, facilitators can make many feel at ease and ready for action, even in deeply troubling times.

What are community agreements that make sense for your space?

* **Cultural competency and social movement literacy.** Grow acquainted with the histories, herstories, cultures, struggles, and liberation movements of our partners and neighbors so that we may be more fully present together.

How are you acknowledging the shared and different histories that we all bring into the space?

* **Practices and cultures of consent.** Practice a culture of consent to more fully honor the complicated and often traumatic life stories of dispossessed and displaced peoples.

What actions can you take to create shared ownership of a space?

* **Compassionate communication and deep listening.** Practice listening with humility, without judgment, openly, and reflecting felt meaning with compassion.

What community agreements can you use so that everyone’s voice is heard?

* **Appropriate technologies.** Crowd source and share social and cultural ‘technologies’ that bring disparate groups of people together quickly and effectively.

What tools can you use to maintain a history of the space? What tools might allow for people to be able to better communicate and care for another?

* **Cultural replication/pay it forward.** Understand the importance of growing this sacred work outwardly in the world as an ethos and a practice.

How can what’s happening in the space, with participant consent, be shared to create more spaces of sanctuary?

* **Embodied awareness.** Grow a deeper understanding of our own physicality, as well as those of the people with whom we share space & time.

Reflection

- * How do the different strategies outlined above relate to your ability build, maintain, and steward sanctuary?
- * What surprised you on this list? Is anything missing? What would you add?
- * How are you already practicing any of these strategies in your own life?



Activity: Building Sanctuary through a safe space

Using this blueprint for the PHLA Sanctuary dome—a space intended to honor and embody sanctuary in its many forms—to sketch out what you would place in the dome to create your own sanctuary or sense of “home.”



Reflection

- * Why is each item you placed in the dome significant?
- * Share with a small group. How could you merge your sanctuaries into one? What potential conflicts arise?
- * Now, imagine that your shared sanctuary is open to the public. What agreements could you use to make sure that it remains a space of ease, calm, care, and/or refuge?

In the Henceforward...

"We are not going anywhere, we will stand here and all over and call until all chains are broken. And they take down the fence and dismantle the bars. And erase the lines and open the borders. And shatter the ceiling. And justice comes to our neighborhoods. And the world at last guarantees our living. Because you are not free until all of us are free."

—NoViolet Bulawayo, "The Declaration of Unity,"
UNTIL WE ARE ALL FREE Campaign

"Henceforward is the name for the struggle that must always begin again."

— Joy James

"Utopia is on the horizon. I move two steps closer; it moves two steps further away. I walk another ten steps and the horizon runs ten steps further away. As much as I may walk, I'll never reach it. So what's the point of utopia? The point is this: to keep walking."

— Eduardo Galeano

We thank you so much for engaging with this guide, and opening yourselves up to the expansive *Philadelphia Assembled* project. I must admit that this educational guide would not be the same without the inspiration of the UNTIL WE ARE ALL FREE campaign, which continues to live on at untilweareallfree.com. The invitations in this guide are meant to give you access into the world(s) of *Philadelphia Assembled*, and we sincerely encourage you to add, revise, adapt, and extend these activities to reach more and more audiences.

Joy James theorizes the "henceforward" as an orientation to live the future in the now. As you continue on, I ask that you consider how the inquiries presented here can be applied to your life, recognizing our inevitable social interconnectedness and natural interdependence. How can you contribute to a movement to shape a collective future where all of us can be free? What actions must you take in the now, so that that future can become a shared global reality? Let us take that as our work. Let us claim this beautiful struggle as our walk. Henceforward.

—Christopher Rogers

