Echoes: A Collaborative Abolitionist Curriculum in Four Chapters DIY Guide

This DIY guide is presented as part of Echoes: A Collaborative Abolitionist Curriculum in Four Chapters. Taking inspiration from the lesson plans used during the course of the Fortune Society workshops, we hope this guide provides a means of processing and reflecting on the materials offered throughout this curriculum page.

The following has been partially adapted from ‘Memories for the Future’ DIY Guide.

Create a self-portrait.

How can you take a self-portrait that communicates your past experiences through bodily gestures and movement?

Suggested materials
Image and audio recording device (camera, phone, computer, tablet, etc.)
Audio editing software (Audacity, AudioMass)
Journal
Writing utensils (pencil, pen, etc.)
Personal archive (family albums, home videos, diaries, letters)
Step 1: Consider the following questions.

Ask yourself:

What are the narratives you have created about yourself and your experiences? How do you witness yourself?

Consider how your body might be a storyteller. As in: How do you hold or carry experiences in your bodies? And how might you change/adapt your bodily or somatic responses to the past?

Make a list of all the ways you engage with your past. Think about how specific people, places, sounds, tastes, etc. trigger bodily reactions.

How do we express our memories through our gestures and movements? As in: How might the way you stand, walk, move your hands, embrace others (or don’t embrace others), etc. be a reaction of past experiences?

Step 2: Explore visual inspiration.

Look at still images (family photos, phone snapshots, magazines, photo books, etc.) and listen to music or soundscapes.

Dig through archives: Places where you store memories, papers, images, and sounds. This could be your voice notes or camera roll on your phone, a playlist, or a box where important family items are kept.

Using the images you found or the ones here, briefly imagine a narrative for the people inhabiting the photographs. How does the artist capture bodily gestures and movement? What does body language express about how they feel or think? How, if at all, does it reflect their subjectivities or lived experiences?
Step 3: Gather your materials and start planning.

Look at what you have around you. Experiment with different tools such as a phone, computer, tablet, or camera, all of which will give your recordings different textures. Once you’ve decided which tools to use, you might want to choose photographing locations.

Step 4: Photograph!

As you photograph, try standing in different places and see how that changes your shot. If you have control over your lighting, consider altering the strength and sources to shape the mood and tone of the environment.

Extension activity:
Create your own soundscape

Step 1: Write a caption for your portrait using descriptive language.

Reflect on the felt experience of the portrait, of creating it, of how it does (or does not) reflect the enormity of your experience.

Step 2: Record the audio on your voice memo app.

You can directly read your caption, verbalize your natural flow of consciousness, or do a combination of both.

Capture different sounds and voices in your environment. One way of going about this is by circling the words in your caption that stand out to you, taking a moment to imagine a sound that embodies each word, and then creating or finding that sound in your environment.

Consider using clips of songs, film and television, and conversations (with consent), but only incorporate these clips if you do not intend to publish the soundscape. Uploading your work with copyrighted material may cause it to be disputed and/or removed from online platforms.

Step 3: Edit the audio.

Export your audio from the voice memo app and upload it to audiomass.co, a browser based editor. Experiment with cutting, copy-pasting, and moving sounds. Explore layering the environmental sounds you captured onto your voice.

Consider what feelings your soundscape conjures, and how do they move through your body? What do your limbs want to do in response?

Final notes to consider

Use what you’ve got: This digital DIY-guide assumes access to digital equipment such as phones or computers. If you don’t have easy or regular access to the materials mentioned, we encourage you to do whatever you need to fit your project to your situation or to consider how you could obtain access to additional options (e.g., borrowing from or partnering with others, using public library resources or school equipment, or looking into analog devices).

Process over product: While this DIY guide is meant to give you a roadmap, we want to emphasize exploration and experimentation over creating an “ideal” final product.

If you have suggestions for how this guide could be improved or made more accessible, please write to us: publicprograms@studiomuseum.org.