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NARRATIVES OF THE SOUL: MEMORIES OFJOY IN BLACK LIFE

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Abstract

This chapter explores the importance of memory, or remembering, in helping youth connect with resources in their lives, in order to experience joy and flourishing. It looks specifically at "cultural collective memory" which has to do with our ability to recall the past based on a common experience or known story. Collective memory makes possible our connecting with and learning from our heritage as well as considering the future based on what is learned. The chapter focuses on narrative as a particular vehicle for connecting youth with this collective cultural memory. It offers an in-depth exploration of the personal, social, environmental and theological themes in short stories and poetry by Zora Neal Hurston, James Baldwin, Alice Walker and several African American youth and young adults to exemplify the richness of narratives in African American history and collective memory. These examples also point to many ways youth and young adults are already engaging in collective remembering and inviting more youth and adults into this process. The chapter concludes with a *Sankofa* pedagogy that outlines one model of how to engage youth in telling their own stories and entering into collective remembering of significant stories in African American culture.

An Introductory View: Memory as Joy Enhancing Expression

Memory is our ability as human beings to bring forth from the past something that is pertinent to us in the present. It is our capacity even when we are not fully aware of it to carry out particular tasks like putting on our clothes right side out rather than inside out, or accessing our email using a chosen password. This kind of memory is called "procedural memory." Another kind of memory is semantic in nature. Semantic memory happens when we are able to call forth certain factual knowledge we've learned over time about the world and things around us. So, through this kind of memory, we can identify a hat, horse, or house, and the difference between them. Psychologists also tell us that memory extends to recalling the details of events, people, places, and times. Referred to

as "episodic memory," this recall makes possible our entering a scene or experience in the past by travelling back to it or engaging in what Endel Tulving calls "mental time travel," in order to glean meanings of the past for the present and/or for the forward journey.[i]

In this chapter, we propose that there are, in the African American heritage, lived experiences of joy that can enrich young people's, and for that matter, all of our understanding of and openness to joy in the daily sojourn of life. Specifically, we propose that there is something worthy to be found in remembering the past. Therefore, we move to still another view of memory called "cultural collective memory," which has to do with our recalling the past based on a common experience or known story. It is embodied in rites, objects, monuments, and a variety of texts such as prayers, music, poetry, sermons and scripture along with ideas, values and norms.[ii] Collective memory makes possible our connecting with and learning from our heritage as well as considering the future based on what is learned. Through it, the cultural past becomes a data bank, an identity forming medium, and a stimulus for interrogating the present, grappling with current dilemmas, and seeing possibilities for life's journey ahead.[iii] This view is further epitomized in the West African Akan tribal view of moving forward while looking back that is captured in the symbol of the Sankofa Bird. The bird whose feet and body are directed forward while the head and eyes look backward embody the idea of going back for what which has been forgotten.

Engaging young people in "backward time travel" is particularly important. In Black culture, a phenomenon of the post-desegregation era that followed the mid-twentieth century Civil Rights Movement has been the gradual diminishment of a shared intergenerational memory by which the young gain knowledge of the lives of past generations and how forebears found joy amidst mayhem. As such in this chapter, we not only explore the importance of memory but the means of engaging youth in remembering. In particular, we explore the ways that narratives and story-sharing function as a vehicle of memory and joy with Black youth.

Narrative as Vehicle of Memory and Joy

Story-sharing orally and in writing, including in novels, autobiographies, and poetic expression have consistently been ways Black people have revealed particulars of the self's identities, living environments, relationships, life events, life meanings, and the nature of the forward journey.[iv] These modes of expression have also been remarkable windows into particular cultural contextual views and experiences of joy. Importantly, the shared autobiographical soul stories and narrative materials of Black people past and present are joy enhancing media. Within them are expressions of the soul-the core of the self-filled with inner images and feelings of experienced, thwarted, and nonexistent joy. They invite our reflection on joy, heighten understandings of the nuanced cultural nature and expression of joy, and provide direction for finding, choosing, and embodying joy. In Black narratives, joy is not an inert concept. Rather, joy emerges as something that happens, is sought, or reflected upon at the core or soul of one's being along the sometimes difficult sojourn of life.

The present generation of young people is bringing new and vital attention to joy in Black life as noted in story-telling and conversations by them on Black joy. Kleaver Cruz, a Black millennial, typifies this interest among the young by using his Instagram account to create space to express black joy and encourage others to do so. He described being in a dark place and struggling to make sense of a personal loss, the death of his uncle, and the seeming perpetual and unyielding violence and injustice in the world. He yearned for something else. He longed for joy and translated this yearning into action: "I started this [the Black Joy] project as a means to work through darkness in my life and that turned into a spiritual call to build community around this effort."[v]

An added emphasis on joy by young people appeared in the responses by many of them to an invitation extended by *The Inquirer Daily News* in Philadelphia. To celebrate the 2017 Black History Month, individuals were asked to share a story, poem, or event that "changed their worldview and

created an overwhelmingly joyful outlook on Blackness and strategy on sustaining it."[vi]The stories of young adults in the early and mid-twenty age group were replete with wisdom they drew from past generations and with comments about the joy of remembering and sharing their memories. Their disclosures point to a wider need among the young to explore and reflect on joy in their everyday lived stories and in the literary heritage of Black people. Moreover, what they shared suggests that there is something powerfully efficacious in sharing and reflecting on joy springing from the past. Particularly with regard to connecting with their heritage, really what the young seem to seek and may find is akin to Robert Cataliotti's description of the African American oral tradition. He writes that it provides "a way of remembering, a way of enduring, a way of mourning, a way of celebrating, a way of protesting and subverting, and ultimately, a way of triumphing."[vii]

This chapter centers on what is revealed about joy in the storied materials of novels, autobiographies, and poetry of Black people. Our emphasis is on what is revealed about joy and the opportunity the disclosures afford young people—and all of us—to reflect on joy in our own lives, raise questions about its presence and meaning, and what a forward journey might be like.

A Closer Look

We begin this section with stories of young people. Our purpose in doing so is to indicate that young people are already in conversations on joy. But, more than this, they bring their own views of and search for joy to that conversation. Indeed, when we listen to them, it becomes possible to glean from them the importance of the past and meanings of the wisdom of forbears for them.

Stories from the Heart of Young People

Previous mention has already been made of stories shared by Black young adults as part of the 2017 Black History Month celebration appearing in *The Inquirer Daily News* in Philadelphia. One of the stories charts the journey from sadness to joy. A second one chronicles the important influence of

forbears on personal understandings and experiences of joy made concrete through the life of a grandparent.

From Zach Blackwood, a 25 year old millennial

My grandmother was one of the realest, no bulls-people I've ever met in my life. My grandma was Dr. Franzella Elaine DeLancey, a Ph.D. and university professor for over 30 years. She passed in 2011, but I continue to interact with her through the parts of her that remain physically present in my life.

....

In 2014, I graduated from Drexel University, and my grandmother wasn't there to see me. I was invited to represent the art school by speaking at my graduation alongside a black woman from another college. To my incredible surprise, she thanked Dr. F.E. DeLancey in her speech by name with no knowledge of our relation. I cried. There is black joy in remembering whose shoulders you're standing on. There is black triumph, black jubilation, black gravity in knowing that other people remember their legacy too.[viii]

From ChinazoEnigwe, a 23 year old millennial

One of the best ways I can define black joy is seeing yourself in a light that others try to dim. I was given many opportunities to believe that I wasn't beautiful or enough. Sometimes I entertained those thoughts, but the moment I actually enjoyed me, the undeveloped, flawed, and improper me, was when I found the joy. I found God within myself.

I was bullied in middle school, taken advantage of in high school, and struggled with identity in college. But, still, I rejoice…I learned how to love myself. I am a work in progress, but I am enjoying the process. I dance in front of crowds, sing when I'm

> off tune, and most importantly, live care free. My journey is why I started my magazine, KAMSI, for all the girls who were like me and need that moment to experience and express joy.[ix]

These stories testify to the wisdom of past generations. The young people offer an opening for exploring and reflecting on the quest for joy in the literary heritage of African Americans as well as what this quest evokes in us today.

Story and Plot in Pursuit of Joy

The literary creations of past African American writers present a fullness of the details that allow us to trace unfolding narrative events in which the quest for joy occurs. Moreover, we see in these materials evidence of plots or goals and direction of the stories. These aspects of stories reveal whether and when joy is present, whether circumstances eventuate in a tragic plot in which joy is thwarted or absent, whether the quest for joy is sought in a just world, and whether a transcendent dimension is present.[x] In the stories and poetry we will present, joy also emerges from three different vantage points, interwoven with reflections on the divine.

- A very personal perspective. The literary material reveals the quest for and experience of joy in an individual's unfolding story.
- A socio-cultural conscience perspective. The material tells the story about a particular quest for joy that includes resistance or oppositional behavior in response to oppression. The emphasis on conscience reflects an understanding of joy that connects with identified principles or ethical behavior on which life in community must center when faced with trials of life that extend to circumstances of dehumanization, inequities and injustice.
- A natural world perspective. The material reflects a quest for joy in the natural world. This emphasis on nature is reminiscent of the interrelationship of humans and non-human elements

(trees, sun, moon, and animals, etc.) in traditional African cosmology and the connection of nature with joy in Scripture.

A Personal Perspective

The 1937 novel, *Their Eyes are Watching God,*[xi] was written by Zora Neale Hurston, who was born in 1891 to former slaves and died in 1960. She lived with various family members after the death of her mother and re-marriage of her father, supported her own educational pursuits, was mentored by literary artists during the 1920s and 1930s Harlem Renaissance era, and became a prolific writer who received a Guggenheim fellowship to write *Their Eyes Were Watching God.*[xii] The novel is considered the best known of Hurston's work. It narrates the personal story of the main character, Janie Mae Crawford who moved from a joy thwarted existence of muteness and in some ways, invisibility in her teens, to a grown individual who envisioned and claimed joy on her own terms.

Although the story centers on the journey of Janie, it takes into account the lives of community members who struggle in their post-slavery impoverished town and who, like Janie exhibit a profound quest for joy. Janie's quest eventually demonstrates her resistance to the expectations of how women should act (or whether women could be in charge of finding or creating their own joy). On this basis, the search for joy is not primarily about resisting, contesting, or arriving at ways of addressing racial inequities or injustices fraught by slavery; but broadens the search for joy to consider intersectional oppressions encountered by black women, such as poverty and rigid gender expectations.

The unfolding story in *Their Eyes Are Watching God* centers closely on life crises and events that accompany Janie's maturation process alongside relational issues associated with family and community members in the story who are faced with deciding whether their joy lies in looking to White people to learn what the future holds or if joy comes from another source.

Synopsis of the story. The main character, Janie Crawford, lives with her grandmother, not knowing where her parents are, although the story reveals that her mother had been brutally raped at age seventeen. The story begins with Janie's reminiscence of her life as a "great tree in leaf with the things suffered, things enjoyed, things done and undone. Dawn and doom was in the branches."[xiii] It had been Phoebe, a caring listener, who helped Janie tell her story.[xiv] As the story unfolds, in an effort to assure a life of protection, Janie's grandmother, Nanny, who was born in slavery, interrupts her budding adolescent affection for a male, and forces her to marry a man named Joe. This marriage evolves into an abusive relationship with its end resulting from Joe's death from illness. She later became enmeshed in a second marriage, this time to Tea Cake, that contradicted prevailing social-cultural norms because he was twelve years younger than she. Unhappiness seeps into this union and it finally ends in tragedy with her killing him in self-defense during an altercation when, in the throes of his serious illness, his erratic behavior results in the threat to her life.

Along the way, the tendency on the part of Janie and other members of the community is to look to White people to grasp a vision for their future which is reflected early on in Nanny's belief that "the White man is the ruler of everything,. . . and colored folk are branches without roots"[xv] They observe the lifestyle of White people and ponder whether joy is equated with wealth that is observed in the White world and leisure that is inserted along the course of work. They struggle with the questions of whether joy should be sought from the white world, which in that instance, was "the old slave master?" or if the answer to joy is "found in God, the real 'Ole Massa?'"

There is some realization that the answer to the future derived from White people is questionable. Consideration is then given to God that eventuates in their eyes watching God; but in actuality, they stare at the dark, seeing nothing as though, perhaps to get a verbal answer that does not require sight or simply to watch for an illumined opening when God will reveal the direction. The paradoxical behavior of looking to God in the darkness and to the lived existence of White people as

the model and source of life's direction presents a dilemma and raises questions. In this situation, joy is forestalled in the lives of community members. Life proceeds, but the communal story takes on the characteristic of a tragic plot except in the case of Janie.

As a tragic plot, the community's story communicates an intransitive or unchanging result in the quest for joy. Their vision of a future with joy does not materialize beyond the search for it. The plot in Janie's story is a more transitive one. She discovers a more realized future. She finds joy in the authority she places in herself and the decisions she makes on her own life in spite of the views of others and the difficulties of life. This stance builds on the pronouncement she made early in her life that "God tore down the old world every evening and built a new one by sun up."[xvi] Her persistence in striking out on her own in life in spite of its troubles and consequences and her ultimate decision to watch only God lies in contrast to the action of others. This direction chosen by her serves as a twist in the narrative and the emergence of a plot that centers on God and God's direction.[xvii] At the same time, Janie's focus on God evokes within her a new question that may be phrased in terms of whether God is responsible for joy and sadness in the lives of human beings.

The question of joy. The narrative of *Their Eyes Were Watching God* raises some critical questions for exploration by current young people who are in situations where alternatives and opportunities seem cut off. Questions that are raised by the story of Janie and the community members are: "Where do you seek answers for your identity and direction in life?" "What is the source of your joy in the midst of the tough stuff of life?" Furthermore, in the current individualistic, competitive, commodified societal milieu where life chances are shaped by schooling, work, and other opportunities found in wider society: "Are answers to life's questions and joy to be sought from the white world?" "What does a flourishing joyful life look like?" "Is it to have the wealth that is observed in the world?" "Is it to have the option of leisure?" "Is it to be like someone else and, if so, who and why?"

A Socio-cultural Conscience Perspective

In contrast to Hurston's novel, James Baldwin's 1962 book, *The Fire Next Time.*[xviii] is an autobiographical reflection. Published when he was 38 years old during the height of the Civil Rights Movement the book reflects personal experiences in childhood and adolescence and narrates a socio-cultural conscience stance in the intentional focus on race issues, what it means to be black and arrive at a sense of joy in racist white society. The conscience perspective extends beyond narrating and commenting on specific events in Baldwin's life and that of the Black community to exposing White Americans to African American views of them. During his lifetime from his birth in 1924 and death in 1987, Baldwin became known for his writing on race, religion and sexuality.

Synopsis of the story. The story Baldwin presents directly calls attention to the oppressive society in which disdain and hatred of Black people prevails. As events of his life unfold, examples of degrading attitudes and racial profiling appear that are eerie mirrors of current happenings. He writes of humiliation everyday as noted in an incident when, at age thirteen, he was on his way to a library and a policeman whom he passed said to him: "Why don't you niggers stay uptown where you belong?" He also told of a terrifying experience at age ten when two policemen stopped and frisked him, giving their thoughts about his ancestry, assumptions about his sexual prowess, and finally leaving him lying on his back in an empty lot.[xix] He came to a point of absolute clarity that "the police would whip you and take you in as long as they could get away with it."[xx]

Baldwin wrote of fleeing to church for what it offered him amidst the demeaning realities of his teen life. Although his dad was a pastor, he chose not to go to the church led by him, but rather chose the church introduced by a friend that was led by a woman. Although he was determined within his adolescent self not to let oppressive society assign his identity and define him in narrow prescribed terms of sports, singing, and dancing, he was not sure about God's role. He questioned if God was white and, if God's love was supposedly for all, then why was this love not extended to Black people?

In his wrestling, he had a dramatic spiritual experience after which he became a minister and served a Pentecostal church over a three year period at ages 14 to 16. He questioned the biblical premise that Black people were descendants of Ham and, therefore, predestined to be slaves. However, he reckoned if that was the case, then White people were descendants of Cain and, as such, held no claim to superiority. He assailed the inadequate response of the church to oppressive conditions and later sought answers from the Muslim faith but did not embrace that faith, although he found an audience with Elijah Muhammad to be instructive.

Baldwin admits to joy found in the church he has known including the sense of love and the relational life expressed in dinners and outings. But, he expresses a vision of deeper joy demonstrated by people's "respect and rejoice in the force of life, of life itself, and to be *present* in all that one does, from the effort of loving to the breaking of bread" in contrast to the joylessness pervading the lives of White people who are unable to see themselves as they really are.[xxi] He centers the theological claim of joy for Christians in the concept of a loving God who can "make us larger, freer, and more loving."[xxii] But, he adroitly adds: "If God cannot do this, then it is time to get rid of Him."[xxiii] In essence, Baldwin arrives at a point of extolling joy brought into being through the centrality of love in people's lives. In a response to Elijah Muhammad, he tells of the reciprocal love of a few people both Black and White and raises the question: [I]sn't love more important than color?"[xxiv]

He points to love as an intimidating act and the most essential relational act, although possessing tormenting dimensions; and extols the love shown by Black people despite the realities faced in black life. His message to oppressors is that nothing can be given without giving oneself, of risking oneself. Yet, this takes maturity, goes beyond anxiety about status and emphasizes equality rather than superiority.[xxv] Love requires removal of masks and embrace of a "state of being, or a state of grace--not in the infantile American sense of being made *happy* but in the tough and universal sense of *quest* and daring and growth."[xxvi] He communicates to Black people the necessity of an oppositional

approach of repudiation of joyless civilization where cruelty reigns. Moreover, he calls for using the atrocities of the past, the endless struggle, and joy that still shone in the past as lessons and bases for growth and the formation of an unabashed ability to gain and own the self's authority. For him, the lessons of the past point to the ability and the necessity of surviving, of relinquishing the control of fear about the yet unknown future. Added to this perspective is the demand for "great spiritual resilience not to hate the hater."[xxvii] This content of the oppositional approach is Black people's assault against the act and actor of oppression.

Baldwin sets forth for both Black and White people the requirement of doing all that is humanly possible to change the way things are, regardless of the risk, for the sake of coming generations. He concludes by stipulating that fulfilling this requirement "is in our hands; we have no right to assume otherwise."[xxviii] Short of fulfilling it, the prophetic words of the slave song will become realized: "God gave Noah the rainbow sign, no more water, the fire next time."[xxix] We find in Baldwin's story what may be called a just world or social order freedom plot that has a transcendent dimension to it. In that portrayal, the quest for joy is set forth in a vision of a just world or a world in which injustice is overcome. Moreover, the anticipation of joy found in the just world is framed in people's intentional application of the spiritual norm or principle of love as an assault to hate.[xxx] In this sense, the plot resembles the comic tale that envisions the fulfillment of joy on the one hand and a romantic tale that foresees the way of bringing about joy. At the same time, an ironic dimension concludes the story in that Baldwin calls awareness to the threat to a worthy end and the tragic response of fire.[xxxi]

The question of joy. As indicated earlier, the current experiences of Black youth bear kinship to the encounters of Baldwin during his adolescence. However, current day occurrences are exacerbated by the proliferation of violence perpetrated against them and other Black people by police, violence within Black communities and ongoing varies and critical trials and tribulations that evoke in

them great anxiety about their present and future lives and, in fact whether they will live to see the next day. Questions that are raised by the story of James Baldwin for young people to explore are: "Where is God today in revealing the joy Baldwin espouses?" "Is God white? "If so, why and if not, why?" "What's love got to do with it?" "What are the current threats to a just world and joy found in its fulfillment?" "Who is responsible for confronting the threat?"

A Natural World Perspective

In the foregoing stories, the quest for joy is undertaken by people in the throes of their personal growth and development as well as relationships within and beyond family. Beyond the stories, we have found a body of literature that uncovers a vivid quest for joy in Black people's relating with the natural world. In these creative expressions, writers have inserted joy into what Camille Dungy calls ecopoetics.[xxxii]She reflects on the extensive occurrence of nature in the poetry of Black people in her volume entitled *Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry*, that begins with and moves forward from the poetic creations of enslaved forbears.[xxxiii]

Dungy makes clear that the ecopoetics of Black people differ from the traditional Western nature writing that tends to give attention to nature in terms of the "pastoral as diversion, a construction of a culture that dreams through landscape and animal life, of a luxury or innocence."[xxxiv] In contrast, the poems of Black people are written against a backdrop of forced field-work and other kinds of labor, violence, death, struggles to live amidst a host of trials, including those brought about by natural disasters.[xxxv] It is impossible in this chapter to include examples of poems that represent the numerous categories and Black people's complex relationship with nature. Some examples point to the quest for joy in nature (even as social critique) and nature as a conduit for lament, among others.

The Quest for Joy in Nature

In the poem, "Going Out to the Garden,"[xxxvi] by Alice Walker, the quest for joy occurs in an unintended manner. The intended goal was that of planting seeds for a winter crop of mustard and

turnip greens. However, she eyed a gecko suffering as she and others were with the heat. Although observing the amenability of geckos to high temperatures, the poet's recognition of the elongated period of excessive heat prompted a response of spraying water on the creature. Instead of running away to hide as the poet thought, the gecko remained, displayed attentiveness with raised eyes and head in seeming anticipation for more. It was given. The poet then takes the voice of the gecko in the question "Is it the end of the world? This bliss, is it Paradise"[xxxvii] The mission ends with the poet's testimony about a quest to provide comfort that has not simply been satisfied but has ended with "gecko joy" or what is deemed as a creature's joyful reprieve from the tribulation of the world. In the testimony, Alice Walker gives credence to joy that is activated by life-giving human action that enhances existence; moreover, this very action stimulates joy within self.[xxxviii]

In contrast to Alice Walker's poem, other poets express a quest for joy that goes unfilled, even as it is yearned for; and in doing so they also offer a social critique of the current environmental conditions. The Anacostia River flows through the poorest neighborhoods in the Washington, DC area. Existing in the shadows of the nation's Capitol, it is referred to as the "forgotten river."[xxxix] It exists as a health hazard to residents near it; and an advocacy group states that "parents who taught their kids to swim in the river and churches who baptized their members in the river no longer go near it. . . and it does not reflect the needs or wants of the community."[xl] The first-hand experience of the river motivated eight year-old El' Jay Johnson to write the following poem in search of an environment that brings joy.

Just imagine
Waking up one day
Looking out your window starting to say. . .
No bad smells, No smoke
No noise, No trash
No junk, No muddy waters.

Just imagine

No dead birds because of

No dead trees because of

No dead people because of

Be happy! Be safe!

And just imagine a kid

Living by the Anacostia River.[xli]

Nature as a Conduit for Lament

Lament appears as an antithesis of joy in the narrative materials of Black people in response to the mayhem of life. Evidence of it appears in the earlier cited poem of Claude McKay. Another example of lament appears in the poem, "Flooding 2: Water Moccasin's Spiritual," by Douglas Kearney. The poetic writing recasts the words of the Negro Spiritual, "Wade in the water, God's gonna trouble the water.[xlii] The message of that song of enslaved forebears alludes to the New Testament biblical references about the joy evoked by healing of individuals who entered waters that had been "troubled" by an angel of God. The underlying premise of the lyrics is that transformation by means of water made possible by God in biblical times can surely happen in the present.[xliii] However, Kearney's ecopoetic lament reflects a feeling of stark abandonment evoked by a natural disaster:

trouble

in the water

trouble

in the water

water

water

water

god's gon'[xliv]

It is important to recognize and reflect on the presence of or need for lament because doing so accepts the reality that there is much that makes difficult and inhibits joy in the lives of young people in the Black community. At the same time, the lament stands as a reminder of the need for "pathways or those experiences that serve as channels for young people's well-being and environments for joy."[xlv] The lament invites consideration of ways to take action that move persons through lament to joy.

The question of joy. Provocative questions may be asked as means of inviting young people into poetic writing and/or spoken word: "What have you noticed about the nature or the non-human world around you? What does it mean to you? What comparisons might be made between nature and your everyday life? What would you write or put into words about the qualities of nature? What would you write or say about your relationship with nature or a comparison of nature to your everyday life?

Summing it Up

We indicated earlier that collective cultural memory is important for the flourishing of Black youth. This collective remembering helps youth connect with a heritage and way of living, inspired by God and embodied by generations of African American forbears that helps youth search for and experience joy and well-being in their lives. We also note that narratives, particularly the literary materials of Black people across time constitute a legacy that provides "a way of remembering, a way of enduring, a way of mourning, a way of celebrating, a way of protesting and subverting, and, ultimately, a way of triumphing."[xlvi] Throughout this chapter we have pointed to the ways narratives invite not simply opportunities for youth to reflect on their own lives in light of contents, but how what is evoked in them contributes to their own creative expression. The narratives of contemporary young people, shared at the beginning of this chapter, remind us that many young people are already searching for and remembering parts of their lives and the lives of their ancestors that bring them joy.

What remains is for us to work to invite all youth into these collective cultural memories and into the sharing and creating of more narratives.

Curricular Suggestions

Planned experiences that center on narrative materials from the Black perspective are best carried out utilizing a *Sankofa* pedagogy. This instructional strategy guides young people in going back and retrieving meanings of joy that are drawn from Black cultural contexts while at the same time, invites their recalling their own stories. The pedagogy consists of three movements of finding joy, choosing joy, and embodying joy. Each of these movements engages youth in specific **IDEA** strategy of **I**nviting youths' stories of experienced, thwarted, or nonexistent joy; **D**iscovering others' stories of joy across time; **E**xploring more deeply the stories of others across time; and **A**pplying understandings of joy. A synopsis of how this pedagogy has been carried out appears below.

SANKOFA PEDAGOGY: IDEA STRATEGY	
RECLAIMING OUR STORIES: JOY PAST AND PRESENT FOR THE FUTURE IN BLACK LIFE	
Finding Joy:	***Inviting youths' stories.*** Finding joy includes recalling one's own story of struggle and overcoming and opening thoughts on where joy appeared or was thwarted in that story. • Experience: My autobiographic soul story ***Discovering other stories of joy across time.*** It's to engage youth in connecting this history with their own stories, and to the Source of joy. • Poetic Inspiration: " Shoulder to Shoulder," by A. SafiyahFosua, found in *Mother Wit: 365 Mediations for African-American Women* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1996). • Guiding questions: *How have African Americans experienced joy and remained joyful in struggle and oppression? What is the Source of our joy? How can we connect with the joy experienced by our forbears?* ***Exploring more deeply the stories from across time.*** • Experience: Critical analysis of *Their Eyes Were Watching God, The Fire Next Time* • Guiding questions: *"Where do you seek answers for your identity and direction in life?" "What is the source of your joy in the midst of the tough stuff of life?"* ***Applying understandings of joy*** • Experience: Centering prayer and meditation developed and presented by the youth.

Choosing Joy:	***Inviting youths' stories.*** Choosing joy includes making an intentional effort to be joyful and see the joy in others. It is recognition that being joyful and expressing joy can be an act of resistance and improve our outlook on life. It is a reminder that Christians are called to *rejoice in the Lord always.* • Guiding Question: *In what ways have you chosen joy or observed others whom you would say have chosen to be joyful amidst life's difficulties?* ***Discovering other stories of joy across time.*** It's to engage youth in seeing whether or how the story of another connects with their story and thoughts about choosing joy. • Poetic inspirations: Paul Laurence Dunbar's "With the Lark". • Guiding questions: *What does the poem say about choosing joy? In what ways do it or does it not reflect your views on choosing joy? Why?* ***Exploring more deeply the stories from across time.*** • Experiences: Critical analysis of the Black Joy Project: Stories of the Millennials • Guiding questions*: What is joy? Is being joyful something that just happens? Can we choose to be joyful? Can we create space to celebrate and be joyful? How does intentionally expressing/sharing joy change our lives or attitude? Complete the sentence: Joy is . . .* ***Applying understandings of joy*** • Experience: Creative reflection on choosing joy and Reflection on Jubilate Deo version of Psalm 100 (See on the web: Psalm 100.Jubilate Deo Episcopalnet.org). • Guiding questions: *What is the decision that is called for? What behaviors are cited?*
Embodying Joy:	***Inviting youths' stories.*** Embodying joy includes actual narrative experiences. • Experience: Embodied expression through a group mural drawing depicting images and sayings of joy found and expressed. ***Discovering embodied stories of joy across time.*** Explore more deeply stories revealed in autobiographical expressions, novels, and poetry: • Inspiration: "Anacostia River: Just Imagine," poem by El' Jay Johnson in search of an environment that brings joy. • Guiding questions: *What in the poem points to or represent joy? What if it is not possible to describe joy? How is joy expressed in our living environments & in everyday we do?* ***Exploring more deeply practices across time.*** • Experience: Semi-structured Free Play: Write a poem, create and present a spoken word or drama. ***Applying understandings of joy*** • Reflections on meanings of joy evoked by embodying practices. • Silent and expressed testimonies on what has taken place over the course of the three themes of Finding Joy, Choosing Joy, and Embodying Joy.

Curriculum Resources

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[xiv] Zora Neale Hurston, *Their Eyes Were Watching God,* 12.

[xv] Ibid., 17, 19.

[xvi] Ibid., 30.

[xvii] The reference to a tragic plot here builds on James Hopewell's description of tragic tales as ones that portray decay in life and his allusion to Linda Bamber's depiction of a world that fails to yield to the desires of people regardless of their need for it. See: James F. Hopewell, *Congregation: Stories and Structures* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1987), 60; Linda Bamber, *Comic Women, Tragic Men: A Study of Gender and Genre in Shakespeare* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1982), 22.

[xviii] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time* (New York: Dell Publishing Company, Inc., 1963, 1962).

[xix] James Baldwin, *The Fire Next Time,* 33-34.

[xx] Ibid., 35.

[xxi] Ibid., 57.

[xxii] Ibid., 61.

[xxiii] Ibid., 61.

[xxiv] Ibid., 85.

[xxv] Ibid., 100-102.

[xxvi] Ibid., 109.

[xxvii] Ibid., 113.

[xxviii] Ibid., 119.

[xxix] Ibid., 120.

[xxx] While we do not address the issues framed in Frankenberg's article, we find helpful his opening reference to belief in a just world that defines the just world plot appearing in Baldwin's reflective autobiography . See: Gunter Frankenberg, "Human Rights and the Belief in a Just World," I-CON 12(1), 2014:35-60 (35-36. DOI:10.1093/icon/mot068 iglp.law.harvard.edu/wp-content/uploads/2014/06/GunterFrankenberg_HumanRights_35_full_.pdf

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[xxxii]Camille T. Dungy, *Black Nature: Four Centuries of African American Nature Poetry* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2009), xxi.

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[xxxvi] Alice Walker, "Going Out to the Garden," *The World Will Follow Joy: Turning Madness Into Flowers* (New York: Perseus Distribution 2015), 187-188.

[xxxvii] Alice Walker, "Going Out to the Garden," 188.

[xxxviii] Ibid.

[xxxix] Anacostia Riverkeeper, "Advocacy, Access, Action," 1, www.anacostiariverkeeper.org/environmental-justice

[xl] Anacostia Riverkeeper, "Advocacy Action," 1.

[xli]El'Jay Johnson, "Anacostia River," www.physics.ohio-state.edu/~wilkins/energy/poemstosaveearth.html

[xlii] A version of the spiritual appears in: *Songs of Zion* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1981), #129.
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