



ARCHIVISTSAGAINST.ORG

Borrowed Time – Letters to My Future Self

Author: Itza Carbajal

CC license is Attribution-NonCommercial (CC BY-NC)

This exercise was created for the [Archives and Climate Change Teach In](#) action, a solidarity effort for the 2019 Global Climate Strike. Teach In coordinators are encouraged to review the [facilitation guide](#) & the [design a teaching exercise guide](#).

Learning Scope

In response to Barbara and Beverly Smith warning for “fellow Black lesbian feminists not to depend on public and academic archives for their survival” this learning exercise encourages participants to recognize the power of writing their own history through the method of feminist correspondence. As part of documenting and affirming an individual’s experience, this exercise also facilitates avenues for discussions around imagining a future even when that future is not guaranteed.

Learning Objective

Participants should leave with

- Ability to express concerns to themselves and others on the ongoing Climate Change crisis.
- Listen to the concerns of others regarding the issue.
- Document own experiences through feminist correspondence.
- Recognize the role of self-documentation in memory work.

Intended Audience

Exercise can be used with a general audience, but questions and terminology should be adjusted accordingly for those not directly involved in archival or other memory work.

Anticipated outcomes

Participants will gain a personal connection to the ongoing Climate Crisis, the reality of a suffering planet, and a recognition of how climate change impacts a person’s current and future plans.

Time

This exercise requires a minimum of 1 hour, but can be done on an individual basis with no time limit.

- Introduction: 10 minutes
 - Bypass this part by printing out the following 1 page instruction sheet
- Writing: 50 minutes

Materials

The following supplies are required for participation.

- Letter size paper
- Pencils
- Archival box (optional)

Readings

- “Seek the Roots: An Immersive and Interactive Archive of Black Feminist Practice” by Alexis Pauline Gumbs
 - <https://journals.litwinbooks.com/index.php/jclis/article/view/50>
- “The Wise Counsel of Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie’s Feminist Manifesto” by Nia Hampton
 - <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/03/07/the-wise-counsel-of-chimamanda-ngozi-adichies-feminist-manifesto/>
- “Letters To The Dead: Shadow Writing For Grief & Release” by Lisa Marie Basile
 - <https://www.lunalunamagazine.com/dark/letters-to-the-dead-writing-for-grief>

Approaches

Participants should become familiar with the concept “Self Definition” as developed by Patricia Hill Collens in the book *Black Feminist Thought*. Self-definition refers to the power to name one's own reality potentially resulting in some form of documentation that can resist erasure and be preserved and shared across generations.

How to lead this exercise

Instructions are broken down by section with potential questions that can be used to prompt writing and discussions. Modifications will be done to the questions according to the experiences and backgrounds of participants

- **Introduction**
 - During introductions facilitator should give an overview of the supplies, time allotment, and suggested prompt questions
- **Writing**
 - Participants will be encouraged to cultivate through letter writing method a deeply reflective and intimate look at a participant’s feminist practice of imagining their future
 - Participants should consider the following questions when writing their letter:
 - What is my “archival future” in the face of climate change?
 - Where am I heading given the political, ecological, ethical, and emotional directions today's environmental crisis places in front of me?
 - What can or should I say to future me about today's world and my role as an archivist, documentarian, and memory worker?
 - What last words would you document about your life if your future is not guaranteed?

Source

This teaching exercise was created by Itza Carbajal (www.itzacarbajal.com) as part of the Archives and Climate Change Teach In action on September 20, 2019. Exercise is adapted from a 2018 Archival Education and Research Institute workshop led by Ego Ahaiwe Sowinski titled “Archival Love, Letters for Our Future.”