

CREATIVE STORYTELLING TOOLS & TECHNIQUES FOR DESTIGMATIZING ABORTION

By Amrita Kumar-Ratta, PhD (C)
Founder & Creator of Shades of Brown Girl





The International Network for the Reduction of Abortion Discrimination and Stigma (inroads) is a global network and community of practice dedicated to learning, skill-sharing, and making sustainable and measurable changes to reduce abortion stigma and its discriminatory outcomes locally and across the globe. We provide opportunities and resources to help learn, connect, collaborate, gather, and fund stigma-busting efforts worldwide.

If you are not a member yet, join us today!
Membership is free.



ABOUT THE SESSION

This session aims to engage with creative storytelling tools for destigmatizing abortion experiences, using embodied and reflective practices for abortion justice work.

Participants can use the tools introduced here for themselves and their communities as collective creative, healing, and mobilization practices.

We believe that when you practice creative storytelling for destigmatizing abortion, as you will do through various exercises in this workbook, it can be powerful, transformative, and authentic.

ABOUT THE TRAINER

Amrita Kumar-Ratta

Amrita (she/her) is a writer, creator, and community facilitator currently completing a PhD in Human Geography. Her work focuses on gender equity, diasporic experiences, and reproductive health and well-being. Amrita is the founder and creator of “Shades of Brown Girl,” a creative storytelling and community healing space for diverse South Asian identifying women.

Instagram: <https://www.instagram.com/shadesofbrowngirl/?hl=en>

Facebook: <https://www.facebook.com/shadesofbrowngirl/>



AGENDA

- Guided meditation: Identity, Work, and Images
- Advancing Abortion Justice Work through Creative Storytelling: Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity of lived experience
- Introducing Color Psychology & the Art of Poetic Monologue: From concept to embodied practice
- Activity: Creative Storytelling Prompts
- Around the Campfire: Story Sharing & Discussion
- Resources

GUIDED MEDITATION

For this starting segment, feel free to put on calming, meditative music of your choice or find a quiet corner for 10-15 minutes.

Take three deep breaths and walk through this guided meditation, with a pen, markers, and paper if you wish.

i. Your identities



"I am large, I contain multitudes."

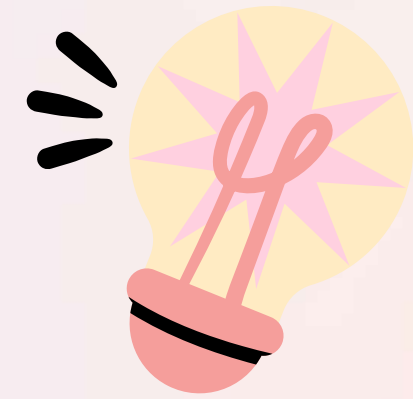
What are the stories of your life that you bring to the work that you do?

What connects you to the communities you work with and to the stories you continue to witness?

In your experience, what does bodily autonomy and bodily safety mean to you?

Think about a time when you experienced what your own bodily autonomy means to you.

2. The stigma-busting work you do



Reflect on your own experiences and/or the experiences of the communities you work with in your stigma-busting efforts.

What are some of the most powerful or affective stories you have witnessed?

What made these stories so powerful? What connected you to them?

3. Thinking about colors and images



What colors or images come to mind when you visualize your own body and your story?

What about the stories of the communities you work with?

Now picture the colors that come to mind as you remember and hold these images in your mind and body.

Do you see bright colors? Do you see bold colors? Do you see shadowy colors? Pay attention to the images, colors, and bodily sensations that are coming up for you.

4. Sharing and Reflection



Reflect, draw, or write out the stories, images, colors, ideas, and insights that came to mind throughout the guided meditation process.

If anyone would like to share with the group, this could be the time to do so.

(Check the next slide for community agreements on creating a safe+brave sharing space.)

Community Agreements

Privacy: We agree to respect people's privacy. People may be sharing vulnerable truths in this space, and while it's ok to share what I learn with others, it is not ok to identify anybody outside of this space, unless I have their express consent to do so.

Just participation: We agree to be conscious of how much space and time we take up, such that everybody has equal opportunity to contribute to and benefit from what is co-created in the session.

Respect: We agree not to judge another for how we express ourselves in this space. We are here to share vulnerably and not to compare our experiences.

No assumptions: We agree to approach one another with curiosity and humility and not assume to know anything about one another's experiences (Eg. Using "I" statements when sharing with the group).

Discussion



Advancing Abortion Justice Work through Creative Storytelling:
Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity
of lived experience

Discussion: Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity of lived experience

What are common feelings or emotions that you / your community experience around abortion?

With the knowledge that in stigma-busting work, we hold the truth of how experiences of grief and loss also coexist alongside experiences of joy, celebration, and relief.

Discussion: Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity of lived experience

What are some of the diverse and complex contexts or experiences of the communities you work with?

This can include socioeconomic status, race/ethnicity, gender and sexuality, religion, varied circumstances for abortions, and more.

Discussion: Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity of lived experience

What does abortion justice mean to you?

Some possible answers:

Equitable access to abortion support, info, education, and trauma-informed care; a collective/community approach to abortions; the ability to seek abortion on one's own terms; being able to center our lived stories and experiences.

Discussion: Affirming the importance of bodily autonomy and the complexity of lived experience

How can creative storytelling help advance abortion justice?

Some possible answers:

Through acknowledging the diversity and complexity of lived experience(s) of abortions; providing space for somatic awareness, self-expression, and healing; advocating for equitable access and increased education and resources; advocating for sexual and reproductive bodily autonomy; creating solidarity in loving/caring communities; encouraging greater sharing and louder voices

“(A)bortion does not occur in isolation. There is always a story ... The way to understand these experiences is to listen. And we must listen to those most affected by the issue: Low-income people, racial and ethnic minorities, the under- and uninsured, people living in rural areas, young people, and lesbian, gay bisexual, transgender, nonbinary, and intersex people, to list a few of the groups of people most affected by restrictions on access to abortion care. We must try to understand why it is important for people to be able to affirm their lives and pursue liberty and happiness – only then will we be able to make steps toward change.”

-Dr. Meera Shah, *You're the Only One I've Told: The Stories Behind Abortion* (2020)

Introducing Color Psychology & the Art of Poetic Monologue:

From concept to embodied practice

Two creative storytelling tools that you
can add to your stigma-busting toolbox



INTRO TO COLOR PSYCHOLOGY

Color is often used as a **metaphor** for how a certain experience makes us feel or how it impacts us emotionally.

This tool invites us to **visually and poetically explore** emotions, feelings, and energies connected to life experiences.

It **creates space** for expressing *the diversity and complexity of lived experiences* and it **creates opportunities** for *transforming popularized meanings and understandings*.

Eg. Rewriting how black can signify strength instead of death or that red can signify self-love instead of anger.

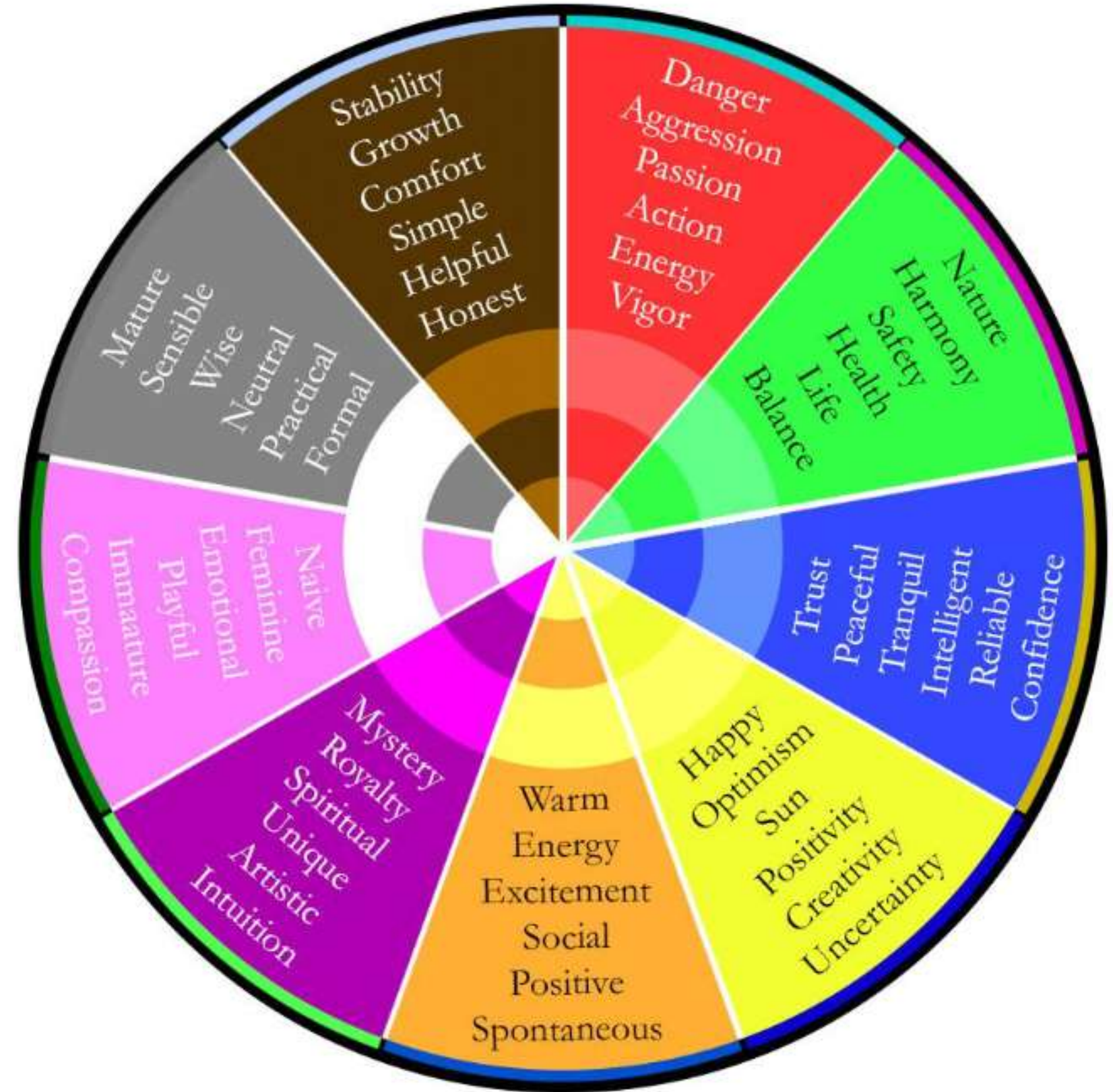


A NOTE FROM THE TRAINER

There are many different ways of thinking about color associations - I don't believe there is one formula for what one color may represent, just like how people don't experience abortions in only one way, although mass media and stigma may tell us otherwise!

So I'm giving you a few examples to emphasize that colors (and abortions) can mean whatever you want them to mean - whatever meaning is coming up for you...

The following color wheels represent the many ways in which colors can be associated with a diverse range of emotions and lived experiences. Have a look through them as we go through our creative storytelling exercises.



Protection
Security
Serious
May seem boring
Use in moderation

Positiveness
Motivation
Makes you hungry
Heat
Comfort and protection

Sensuality
Innocence
Sweetness and delicacy
Gluttony
Immaturity

Hope
Health, life and growth
Soothing
True
Chance

Purity
Cleanliness
Emptiness and isolation
Equality
Peace

Love and passion
Emergency
Powerful and dynamic
Stimulates the appetite
Fear

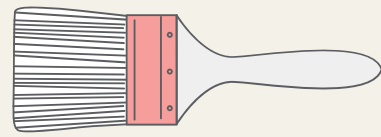
Luxury
Courage and loyalty
Mystery and magic
Creativity
Introspection

Serious
Mystery
Elegance and sophistication
Creates contrast
Sad and negative

Heat
Joy and optimism
Inspiration
Cheer you up
Makes you critical

Trust and stability
Honesty
Loyalty
Hard to perceive
Reassuring

In short, color psychology can...



Be a tool for visually and poetically exploring the emotions, feelings, and energies connected to abortion experiences



Create space for expressing the diversity and complexity of abortion experiences as experienced in your body and your communities



Create opportunities for transforming popularized (and often stigmatized) meanings and understandings of colors and the stories they come with!



Creative Storytelling Activity #1

With pen and paper in hand, take 2 minutes to visualize a color or multiple colors (maybe the ones you visualized in the guided meditation, maybe others) that are either:

i) connected to your abortion experiences

or

ii) connected to how you are feeling in this particular moment

Creative Storytelling Activity #1

From there, finish the statement(s):

“I am...”

“I feel...”

“My body is the color...”

Draw on color, current feelings and bodily sensations, abortions and/or any other experiences connected to your body as applicable.



Creative Storytelling Activity #1

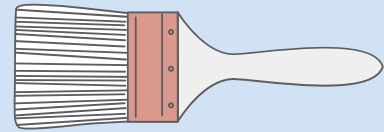
Another writing prompt:

**"The color ___ connects to my abortion story
because ..."**

What stories, experiences, moments, ideas are coming up?
If anyone would like to share, please feel free to.



Intro to Poetic Monologue



Expresses a linear or non-linear story through feelings, emotions, and thoughts



Invites the dramatic performance of complex and diverse stories and human experiences



Invites an audience to witness truth-telling and the inspiring world-making that often comes with this

mon.o.logue

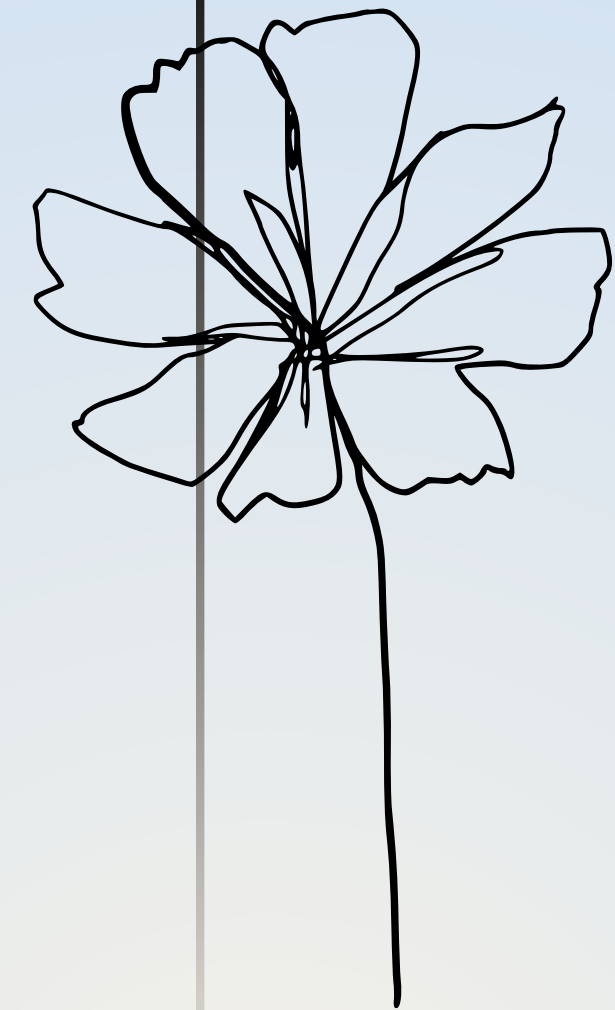
a long speech by a single speaker

Monologue itself is a narrative technique, but it's also a poetic technique + a performance technique.

This tool gives an audience perspective into a person's own lived experiences - in all their beauty and diversity and and complexity - through the modality of spoken performance.

It allows the storyteller to go into as much detail as they want by inviting the storyteller to create a world, and inviting audience members to enter that world.

Monologues can be performed in the voice of the past, present, future. They can reflect current or dream realities and can include characters, settings, and themes which support stigma-busting and abortion justice work.



A note from the trainer:

“

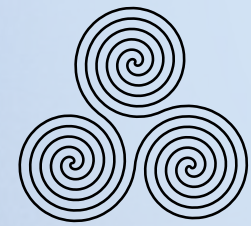
I use the term 'poetic monologue' because for me, it captures the lyricism and poetry of our everyday thoughts, in everyday conversation. There are so many ways in which poetry is infused into our experiences, which storytelling can bring out in creative and powerful ways.

I love the ways in which poetic monologue can be. It has been both an individual creative pursuit, as well as a practice done in community to amplify community voices and stories - especially those that have been historically silenced, invisibilized, and marginalized.*

”

**For powerful examples of poetic monologue, see "For colored girls who have considered suicide / when the rainbow is enuf" by Ntozake Shange*

Elements of Poetic Monologue include:



Symbols, metaphors, imagery (which can include the colors we have been using)

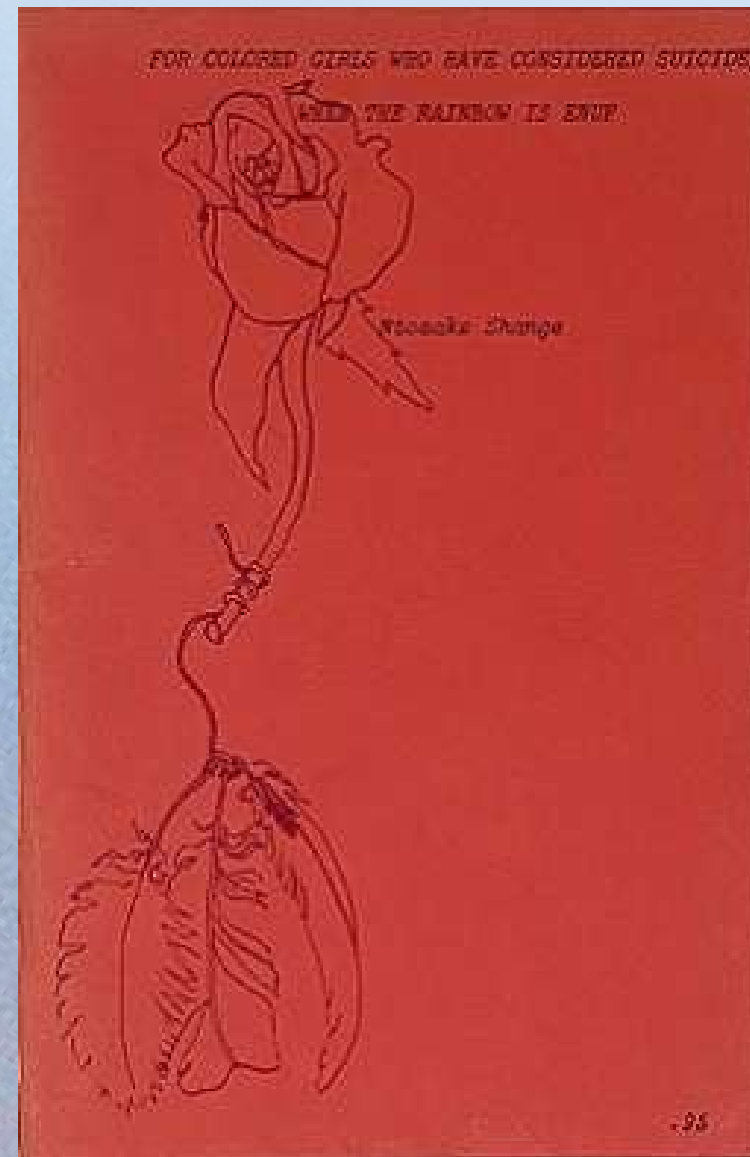


Some kind of narration – Linear or non-linear, sensical or non-sensical



World-making – with characters, spaces and places, plot twists, and dramatic descriptions of YOUR making!

Examples of poetic monologues

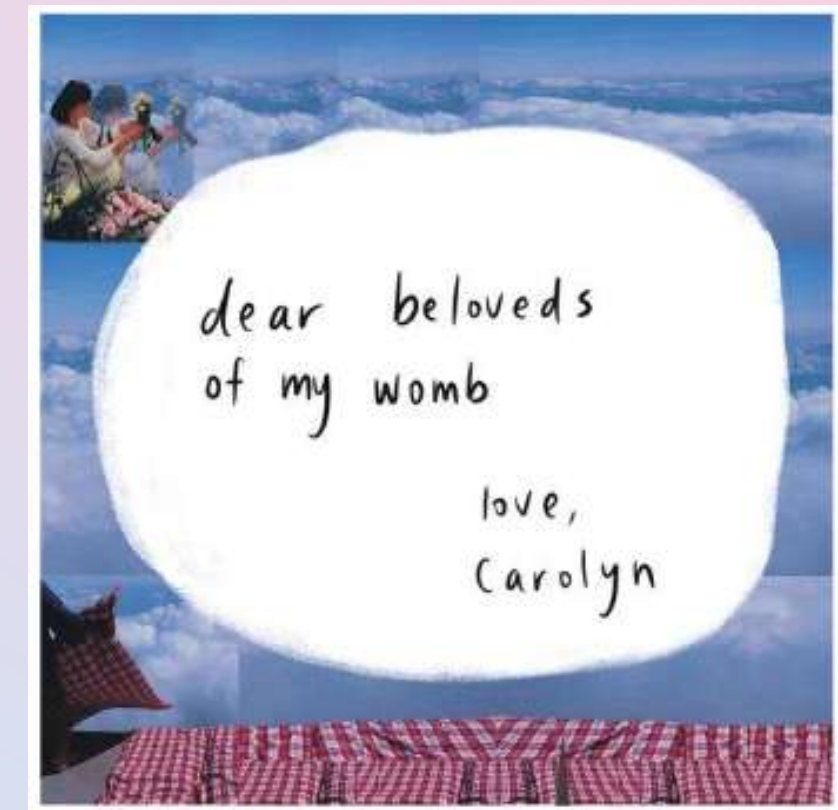


**for colored girls who have considered
suicide / when the rainbow is enuf
by Ntozake Shange**



bug by Yolanda Bonnell

bug is a solo performance and artistic ceremony that highlights the ongoing effects of colonialism and intergenerational trauma experienced by Indigenous women, as well as a testimony to their resilience and strength.



**Dear Beloveds of my Womb
by Carolyn Marvin, with love**

Tips for Creative Writing



Creative Storytelling Activity #2

Write a poetic monologue!



Draw on color, current feelings and sensations, abortion stigma-busting and/or any other experiences connected to your present as applicable.

Write a letter, a speech, a one-sided dialogue, a collection of thoughts, a running list - whatever you feel called to write in this moment of reflection and embodiment.

Creative Storytelling Activity #2

Guiding prompts:

I am ...

I feel ...

My body is the color...

The color ___ connects to my (abortion) story because ...

What I want to tell you about my (abortion) story is ...

Dear ___ (friend/community/partner) ...



Many of these prompts are the same as the ones introduced earlier. This activity invites you to build on what you began to write. Alternatively, choose another color, feeling, emotion, or story and write about that.

You also don't have to use these prompts at all. You can just write!

Campfire Sharing

Take this opportunity to pause and share what you've felt so far.

Read aloud what you've written and take a moment to sit with what you've taken from this journey.



Remember, it doesn't have to be perfect!

More Resources

- **Aborsh Podcast (Canada)**
- **You're the Only One I've Told: The Stories Behind Abortion (United States)**
- **The Abortion Monologues (Canada)**
- **Hidden Pockets Collective (India)**
- **So...I had an abortion (Canada)**
- **Abortion, with love Podcast (Global)**
- **Abortion Out Loud (United States)**
- **Out of Silence: Abortion Stories (United States)**

JOIN US



All the powerful ways you can stay connected & support the movement!

Join | If you are an individual or group working on abortion access and stigma reduction, apply to be part of a free global network that provides opportunities and resources to help learn, connect, collaborate, gather, and fund stigma-busting efforts worldwide.

Donate | Every donation allows us to nurture a network of over 1900 abortion advocates and community organizations working on busting abortion stigma in 109.

Stay informed | Subscribe to our mailing list to receive stigma-busting updates every month!