

Community  
Engagement  
Toolkit

# **BLACK ELEGIES**

## **MEDITATIONS ON THE ART OF MOURNING**



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Brown University Digital Publications  
Providence, Rhode Island

The MIT Press  
Cambridge, Massachusetts  
London, England

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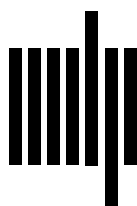
This Community Engagement Toolkit was developed by Brown University Digital Publications to be used with *Black Elegies: Meditations on the Art of Mourning* by Kimberly Juanita Brown.



Please scan this QR code to find an open access digital edition of *Black Elegies: Meditations on the Art of Mourning*.

Cover image: Kimberly Juanita Brown, Brazilian capoeira performance, Salvador da Bahia, Brazil, 2005. Courtesy of the artist.

*Black Elegies: Meditations on the Art of Mourning* is the second volume in the On Seeing series published by the MIT Press.



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## HOW TO SET GUIDELINES FOR SUCCESSFUL CONVERSATIONS

Open conversations about antiblackness, black grief, and mourning are never simple or easy to have. We all have a responsibility to take care of ourselves and each other. One way to begin is by setting agreed-upon ground rules that create space for open-mindedness, curiosity, and discovery.

When setting ground rules, it's important to keep the following in mind:

Make it clear that the group is here to discuss, not debate or argue.

Outline what it means to talk respectfully: listening to one another, not making assumptions about others' statements, asking questions, etc.

Clarify the goals in mind for the meeting/conversation. Are you making a decision? Exploring options? Learning more about one another?

Borrowed from *Ground Rules: How to Set Successful Guidelines for Your Conversation Programs* by the American Library Association Public Programs Office. Read in full at <https://programminglibrarian.org/articles/ground-rules-how-set-successful-guidelines-your-conversation-programs#:~:text=Make%20it%20clear%20that%20the,Are%20you%20making%20a%20decision%3F>, archived at <https://perma.cc/7MGM-2634>.

**Consider these questions:**

What brought us together?

What unique perspectives or experiences do we each bring to the conversation?

What protocols do we want to establish for when disagreements arise?

How will we hold ourselves accountable? What do we expect from each other?

Think of a conversation you've had about antiblackness that felt generative. What happened? What made it feel generative?

Think of a conversation you've had about antiblackness that felt unproductive. What happened? What made it feel unproductive?

## CONVERSATION PROMPTS

In writing about black grief, Kimberly Juanita Brown writes about survivors, “not just those who have survived a loved one who has passed on, but also survivors who negotiate losses that do not end in death: losses like distance, homeland, diminishment, and the absence of care that often accompanies racialized subjects everywhere they go.”

Can you think of other losses that do not end in death?

Brown reflects on sites of mourning that do not register immediately as archives of grief: U.S. slave plantations, a spontaneous street procession, a quilt sewn from the clothing worn by a loved one, a jazz performance, a ballet.

What other sites come to mind as alternatives to recognizable spaces of mourning?

*Black Elegies* contemplates the genre of poetry dedicated to addressing the depth and breadth of loss. While the elegy has a long and vibrant history, particularly in the U.S., black elegies have a less secure space in American literature. Brown considers an expansive range of cultural productions by artists and writers, such as film, fiction, sermons, wood carvings, music, and photography.

Can you think of other cultural forms that allow black subjects to live and mourn in and out of plain sight?

## FURTHER READING

Did the conversation prompts take you or your group in new directions? Are you curious about other books that delve further into these themes? Below is a short list of books mentioned by Kimberly Juanita Brown that examine black grief and mourning.

Brown, Kimberly Juanita. *Mortevivum: Photography and the Politics of the Visual*. Cambridge, MA: The MIT Press, 2024.

Campt, Tina. *Listening to Images*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2016.

Clifton, Lucille. *Quilting: Poems*. New York: BOA Editions, Ltd., 1991.

Cole, Teju. *Black Paper: Writing in a Dark Time*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2021.

Ellis Neyra, Ren. *The Cry of the Senses: Listening to Latinx and Caribbean Poetics*. Raleigh, NC: Duke University Press, 2020.

Enwezor, Okwui. *Grief and Grievance: Art and Mourning in America*. New York: Phaidon Press, 2020.

Hartman, Saidiya. *Lose Your Mother: A Journey Along the Atlantic Slave Route*. New York: Farrar, Strauss and Giroux, 2007.

Holloway, Karla FC. *Passed On: African American Mourning Stories: A Memorial*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2003.

## FURTHER READING (continued)

Hooker, Juliet. *Black Grief, White Grievance: The Politics of Loss*. Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 2023.

Morrison, Toni. *Jazz*. New York: Vintage Books, 1992.

Quashie, Kevin. *Black Aliveness, Or a Poetics of Being*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2021.

Ward, Jesmyn. *Salvage the Bones*. New York: Bloomsbury, 2011.

## TRAUMA AND CARE RESOURCES

We all have a responsibility to take care of ourselves and each other. Below is a short list of resources that offer help with resilience, recovery, and renewal.

The Impact of Racial Trauma and How to Cope

Guide for understanding racial trauma from a mental health perspective

<https://www.verywellmind.com/what-is-racial-trauma-5210344>, archived at <https://perma.cc/HU4N-Y8MM>.

## TRAUMA AND CARE RESOURCES (continued)

Resources to Support Children’s Emotional Well-Being Amid Anti-Black Racism, Racial Violence, and Trauma  
Caregiver guide for speaking with children about racism and racial trauma

<https://www.childtrends.org/publications/resources-to-support-childrens-emotional-well-being-amid-anti-black-racism-racial-violence-and-trauma>, archived at <https://perma.cc/R8GT-9GU3>.

Tender Loving Self-Care for POC: A Guide for Tending to the Wounds of Racial Trauma

Techniques for cultivating bodily, emotional, and social awareness and resilience

<https://www.mindfulleader.org/blog/56241-tender-loving-self-care-for-poc-a-guide>, archived at <https://perma.cc/Z2HN-R3WB>.

Radical Self-Care

Resources about womxn of color traditions of radical self-care

[https://libraryguides.saic.edu/learn\\_unlearn/wellness5](https://libraryguides.saic.edu/learn_unlearn/wellness5), archived at <https://perma.cc/F2LT-PHQH>.