Discovering Stewardship through Play: A Collaborative Approach to Using Applied Theater Techniques for Environmental Education

by

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Abstract

Theatrical productions have long been used to raise awareness around environmental issues. I wanted to examine how techniques from applied theater could be used outside of traditional theater spaces to increase ecological knowledge and activate communities. What if we took the theater out of the theater? I focused on exploring the potential for roleplay to increase awareness of, and engagement with, stewardship of natural areas.

Dialogue was a key part of this project. During the process of creating and implementing, I sought to be in collaborative conversation with scientists and land managers. I built and adjusted the project in line with their feedback, which enriched the project considerably. This collaborative approach also carried through to the implementations. Throughout the dramatic play I encouraged participants to guide the course of our conversations and offer their individual expertise to the group, building their knowledge collectively.

This thesis project took place over three sessions and had three different audiences: the stewardship team at NYC Parks, a group of scientists and artists, and a group of university students. I used tools from a range of applied theater conventions and techniques, including Drama in Education, Process Drama, and Theatre in Education, to build an engaging and fun experience for these participants. I found that the applied theater approach created multi-faceted learning opportunities for participants. Feedback after our sessions indicated that rich meaning making had occurred, along with a great deal of fun.

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While it was outside of the scope of this thesis to do diligent research on, and incorporation of, Indigenous Knowledges, I would like to pay respect to Indigenous peoples past, present, and future, and to acknowledge the ways in which Indigenous Knowledges have informed and continue to inform and inspire my relationship to the natural world. My decade of living in Aotearoa New Zealand exposed me to the indigenous Māori world view, Te Āo Māori, which calls for a caring relationship with the natural world. While at physical theater school in Northern California, I was lucky enough to learn from the school's great supporter Gene Brundin, a member of the local Yurok tribe, and to visit Indigenous sites and celebrations in the area. Closer to New York, the work of Robin Wall Kimmerer has inspired me to rethink ecology through an Indigenous perspective. I hope to learn more as I continue to expand my worldview and decolonize my mind.

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Prologue

My thesis project consisted of the creation and implementation of a guided theatrical experience that aimed to educate participants about volunteer stewardship in New York City Parks. The drama began with the discovery of a mysterious bag 'left behind' in the park. I invited participants to use their observational skills and analyze the items in the bag to solve the mystery of the bag's owner. Participants followed clues leading to multiple sites in and around each park and were encouraged to think about who visits and cares for natural areas. When they found the owner of the bag, participants discovered that they were a volunteer steward. They then had the opportunity to ask them questions, learning about who becomes a steward and how to get involved themselves. I described it as "Part mystery and part guided exploration…an interactive look into the world of stewardship and community care. Learn more about how volunteers care for the green spaces… [and be] prepared to walk around and use your observational skills to solve the mystery! (Upstill 2023)"

I led three sessions of the project, two in Socrates Sculpture Park and one in Central Park. The first session took place in Central Park for the NYC Parks Stewardship Team and the second and third took place in Socrates Sculpture Park, one for attendees at an Artists and Scientists Salon and the final for a student group from a Brooklyn-based university. Throughout, I examined how applied theater conventions, particularly role play, can be used for environmental education.

Chapter 1: Planning

Introduction to the Thesis

This thesis project is a continuation of my work as a resident artist in City Science Lab,[1] a collaborative arts program that became my partner organization. The program's mission is to connect artists and scientists, promoting mutual understanding of, and engagement with, urban ecology through art. I was selected as a member of the 2022-2023 cohort in May 2022 and began work in June 2022. Since the program's emphasis is on conversation between artists and scientists, dialogue has been foundational from the start. With the term 'dialogue,' I am referencing Paulo Freire's *Pedagogy of the Oppressed*:

> Through dialogue, the teacher-of-the-students and the students-of-the-teachers cease to exist and a new term emerges: teacher-student with students-teachers. The teacher is no longer merely one-who-teaches, but one who is himself taught in dialogue with the students, who in turn while being taught also teach. They become jointly responsible for a process in which all grow. (80)

While City Science Lab is an independent organization, they partner with the New York City Department of Parks, with connections to many NYC Parks scientists. NYC Parks "is the steward of more than 30,000 acres of land — 14 percent of New York City — including more than 5,000 individual properties… [and they] look after 600,000 street trees and two million more in parks." Land

[1] This is a pseudonym to protect the identity of my partner organization.

under their management includes public parks, community gardens, and athletic fields. I chose to focus on public parks, and as a result scientists and parks employees from NYC Parks participated in my first two sessions. My thesis question was "how can I engage in dialogue with social and environmental scientists and parks staff to co-create an applied theater project?"

I was drawn to the residency due to previous work in environmental education and urban agriculture, including writing my Anthropology honors thesis on community gardens in Austin, Texas. While I eventually left that field to work in theater, I kept my love of natural areas, and I was excited to revisit environmental and scientific concerns through an artistic lens. Furthermore, I believe in the power of collaboration and interdisciplinary conversation, and I was interested in being in dialogue with scientists and land managers.

During conversations with scientist colleagues over the course of the residency, different themes emerged. Ultimately, we collectively became excited about creating a sense of joy, play, and exploration around stewardship activities. I was especially inspired by a conversation with Sarah,[2] who described the difficulty of recruiting community members to the stewardship program. I realized that I wanted to build something that NYC Parks could use to help activate communities.

My research goals for this thesis were to examine how I could be in dialogue in the creation of the project; to assess how effectively I could adjust my project in response to feedback from my scientist team; and to examine how to

[2] All names in this paper have been changed to protect participants' privacy.

make space for dialogue in every stage of a project. To answer this, I focused on reflections from scientists and park staff in my first two implementation sessions. I incorporated their ideas and adjusted my plans between sessions. I also had a post-implementation meeting with colleagues from City Science Lab.

For my project question I asked, “How can roleplay activate communities towards participating in stewardship activities in natural areas?” More generally, “How can dramatic activity be used to enhance environmental education (EE)?” My project goals were to examine how role play can be used to create an adaptable theater piece for implementation in parks around New York City; to assess the efficacy of using roleplay in EE, and to explore how the conventions and tools of drama could help activate communities.

I implemented my project three times. The first session took place in Central Park for the stewardship team of NYC Parks and lasted an hour. The second session, for City Science Lab collaborators and scientists, took place in Socrates Sculpture Park and lasted two hours. The third session was also in Socrates Park, this time for a student group from a Brooklyn-based university, and lasted two hours.

Why Use Theater in Environmental Education?

Literature indicates that theatrical forms and techniques like social learning, embodiment and popular theater are useful tools for environmental education (EE). Theatrical techniques contribute to active, social learning, which is valuable for EE. Heddon and Mackey note how increasingly “environmental educators are using social learning to refer to open-ended, active learning

(interactive, participatory, risky) that may take place in intersubjective and non-formal settings including the arts, communities, and friendships" (171). Using climate change as their example topic, the authors note that in theater generally, it is difficult to be nuanced. "The risk for performances that seek to engage with complex issues of environmental and climate change is precisely that of presenting information or opinion in a closed and didactic manner" (175). In contrast, they call for a turn towards nuance and "emancipation" in EE (and in applied theater's approach to environmentalism). "To be an emancipated environmentalist – in education or in theater or just to be – is to favor uncertainties and unpredictabilities, avoid the nomothetic and polemic, and incite the equality of intelligence of the participatory individual in matters of environmental import" (177).

Theater has an additional advantage as an embodied art form. In a 2012 article, Julia Lane called for environmental education that "explore[s] the notion of embodiment, as understood from theater and the perspective of Indigenous Knowledges, as a way to promote stronger connection to and responsibility for the environment" (396). Lane reports that "educators who have integrated theatrical practice into their environmental education contexts agree that dramatic engagement not only increases student interest and investment but also facilitates their learning" and points out that incorporating theatrical practice also resonates with Indigenous traditions of "orality, storytelling, and teaching through song and dance" (399).

I can personally attest to the power of popular theater. Growing up in Berkeley, CA, I attended performances by the San Francisco Mime Troupe in our local park. Following popular theater practice, these shows were highly engaging, free, and frankly hilarious. The performance that sticks most in my mind was about the danger of genetically modified crops. I was only around 9 or 10, but I still remember the final scene, in which genetically modified mutant corn takes over the world. To this day I feel a sense of reservation around the widespread use of GMO crops.

While I can't solely credit the Mime Troupe for my interest in environmental activism, they left an impression I've carried through my life and artistic practice. One reason is simply how entertaining and fun it was. My scientist colleagues were particularly drawn to this idea of fun, in contrast to EE that is often dry and scientific. Additionally, we appreciated that popular theater rejects the notion that performances must take place inside isolated, darkened spaces, and instead can happen anywhere, including parks. Nor does popular theater feel the need to contain itself to a specific genre or form. Instead,

> works incorporate a collection of styles and techniques taken from many times, places, and other groups… [and are] for specific audiences, to be performed in specific locales, perhaps even on specific occasions. The focus is on the immediacy of the moment, of performers and spectators being together in the same place at the same time, where two-way communication can occur. (Skank 111-2)

Similarly, I drew upon a range of forms and conventions to deliver a fun and engaging experience, keeping alive the connection between performer and audience in a particular locale.

In summary, research and experience points to theater being most successful in EE when it provides a creative way to present information and offers the chance to synthesize that information; lays the groundwork for other engagement with the environment; offers engagement for multiple types of learners; and integrates with other activities to enliven educational experiences (Curtis 196). It can also be effective when it uses an embodied connection and builds an empathetic connection to nature and natural areas (Lane) and when it uses active, social learning (Heddon and Mackey). The question then becomes, how do we do this with applied theater?

Applied Theater Framework for the Project

My project draws upon techniques from Drama in Education, Process Drama, and Theater in Education. Drama in Education (DIE) refers to a set of techniques and a pedagogical framework pioneered by Dorothy Heathcote and Gavin Bolton for use by teachers in school settings. In DIE, "Heathcote and Bolton separate drama-in-education from the traditions of Western, classical theater by emphasizing the improvisational, by underplaying performance work, and by emphasizing role above character" (Allern 325). Roleplay is a key component in DIE. As Heathcote defines, educational drama "involves people in active role-taking situations in which attitudes, not characters, are the chief concern" (61). By using dramatic activity, Heathcote and Bolton aimed to move

participants towards a deeper understanding. In *Towards a Theory of Drama in Education*, Bolton describes how teachers often focus on delivering 'objective knowledge' and 'objective facts,' while DIE aims to deliver affective learning: learning linked to feeling. Like Lane's noting of the importance of an empathetic connection in EE, according to Bolton, "in play and drama there is obvious learning potential in terms of skills and objectives, but the deepest kind of change that can take place is at the level of subjective meaning" (31).

Process drama, a theatrical form where participants are cast as characters in a historical or social narrative, evolved from DIE. It "implies students and teacher take on roles, to explore a subject content collectively…Process drama can be understood as two activities with different motives/objects, the educational and the fictional, where the fictional activity should have a playful format" (Hallgren and Österlind 1). Once inside the drama, participants are invited to make decisions – either individually or collectively – that impact the fictional world around them. In this way, they investigate the impacts of their decisions and build understanding and empathy for diverse groups. Theater in Education (TIE) refers to a group of techniques used to create pieces that educate young people. All three forms use roleplay, dramatic activity, and aesthetic distance, and my piece drew on elements from each.

There are two reasons I am interested in roleplay as a tool for applied theater. The first is the depth *to* which, and the ways *in* which, roleplay allows us to engage with material. Howard Gardner's Multiple Intelligences theory asserts that human beings have seven to ten distinct intelligences (Paxton et al.). The

logical conclusion is that we should aim to teach people in the way that they learn best, and MI theory calls for pluralization and asset-based thinking in education. One of my strongest learning styles is kinesthetic, so roleplay enables me to engage with material in a way that works for my brain. Here we see again the bodily connection that Lane referred to as a part of embodied EE. Indeed, since there are also often spoken and written components to roleplay, the form can provide many types of learners with an engaging experience. In one study of effective theatrical approaches to environmental education, researchers noted that process drama was particularly useful because it incorporated all learning styles (Curtis et al. 196).

Another compelling aspect of roleplay is that it uses the concept of aesthetic distance, which "enables the audience both to believe and not to believe at one and the same time" (Jackson 120). This position, simultaneously within and outside of the drama, allows participants to engage in Freirean praxis, "reflection and action upon the world in order to transform it" (Freire 51). In my sessions, action appeared in the form of audience engagement, analyzing clues, and deciding where to go next, while we reflected through questions and speculation about the clues, as well as debriefing after each session. This is part of the development of applied theater throughout the twentieth century, when, as Jackson explains, "the search for an explicit *educational* and *interventionist* role for the theater…generated a whole array of new forms and ways of directly engaging audiences" (137). Aesthetic distance allows for what Jackson calls "creative gaps:"

> Only… by offering opportunities for the audience genuinely to find their own ways of completing the imaginative and cognitive journey the play has taken them on, will we allow the aesthetic and the educative to coincide, the one feeding the other. Only then do we stand a chance of creating an artwork that can simultaneously challenge assumptions and develop understanding. (181)

Creative gaps allow space for cognition and learning. By building them into these sessions, I hoped to give participants the space to learn and create new meanings.

Applied Theater Conventions for the Project

I drew upon a few applied theater conventions to develop this project. The first was 'Role-on-the-Wall,' described in *Structuring Drama Work* as when an "important role is represented as an outline of a human figure 'on the wall;' information is added as the drama progresses" (25). I adapted this convention to 'Role-in-a-Bag,' where the inciting incident is the discovery of a lost bag. After analyzing the contents, the new information leads to other locations and clues, eventually filling out the steward character and leading participants to the culminating event of meeting them and asking about their work. This conversation was a version of a convention called 'Hot-seating,' which allows participants to question a character either inside or outside of the play structure. I anticipated this direct questioning would allow participants to deepen their experience of the world in which they were roleplaying (Bolton 158). By investigating the motives of the steward character, I hoped participants would make connections about who engages in stewardship, and why they do so.

I also used the applied theater convention of the ‘Gangbuster.’ This is used at the start of a drama to induce excitement and interest and to move participants into the world of the drama. In my case, the Gangbuster was the introduction of a bag abandoned in the park, thus creating a mystery. By being asked to solve it, my participants also experienced the ‘Mantle of the Expert,’ a DIE concept developed by Dorothy Heathcote. Traditionally used with young children, it is a practice whereby drama participants, in role, are endowed with an expertise they may or may not possess. They are encouraged to assume autonomy, offer advice, and solve problems, thus building their confidence and skills (Heathcote and Bolton). I was particularly interested in using ‘Mantle of the Expert’ in this project since Heathcote developed it to unite science and art, and to help teachers encourage environmental awareness in their students (Allern 327).

‘Mantle of the Expert’ aligns with the work of educational psychologist Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky posited that people learn from “more knowledgeable others.” Unlike traditional education spaces, in Vygotsky’s vision, the “knowledgeable other” does not have to be a teacher. Instead, they can be anyone who knows more about something than the learner (Eti et al.). This concept challenges the hierarchy usually implicit in educational spaces and aligns with Freire’s description of dialogue. Further, Vygotsky asserted that it was when a learner engaged with a “more knowledgeable other” in collaborative dialogue that cognitive development occurred. By asking participants to solve the mystery as a group, I was encouraging them to develop understanding through synthesizing what they already individually knew.

These conventions feel especially pertinent because the content of this project falls within the broad category of "environmental education." In my experience, environmental education is often delivered using what Freire calls "banking" education, "in which the scope of action allowed to the students extends only so far as receiving, filing, and storing the deposits" (72). Students are expected to simply take in information by rote without reflection, critical analysis, or meaningful engagement. By contrast, the conventions above allow us to offer what Freire calls "problem-posing education," where "people develop their power to perceive critically *the way they exist* in the world *with which* and *in which* they find themselves; they come to see the world not as a static reality, but as a reality in process, in transformation" (83-84). I hoped this approach would allow participants to access a new perspective on stewardship, their own role in natural areas management, and local parks.

Project Description

My resulting project was an interactive theater piece that aimed to educate participants about how stewards care for green spaces in parks and on public streets, with the goal of raising awareness and encouraging volunteer activities. In the first part of the experience, participants were guided through a facilitated exploration of a park while solving a mystery. A bag had been left in the park, and we needed to find the owner. The second part involved meeting the owner, a steward, and asking them about their stewardship activities. The session ended with an art-making activity, inviting participants to create envelopes of seeds for someone they would like to invite to be their 'planting buddy.' My intention was

to facilitate synthesis and personal reflection through an embodied arts activity. This also included reflecting on the session as a group. Since one of my goals was to explore how roleplay, through the 'Role-in-a-Bag' convention, could be used to create an adaptable theater piece, I built this piece with a modular structure, in which elements could be changed to make it applicable to other parks.

Why Do New Yorkers Visit and Participate in Natural Areas?

I was also interested in how, and why, New Yorkers engage with natural areas. In *Why Garden? Personal and Abiding Motivations for Community Gardening in New York City*, the authors identify six primary themes that drive stewardship of local community gardens: enjoyment, personal history, improvement, food, community, and education (1194). They report that "the majority of gardeners describe a motivation for gardening based upon personal fulfillment tied to feelings of joy (64% in 2003 and 77% in 2011)" (1195). This is especially fascinating given my colleagues' emphasis on joy as a component of the piece. The idea of 'improvement' was also a substantial theme, and relevant to the type of stewardship highlighted in my sessions. Overall, they found that "personal enjoyment remains the most common motivation, while the desire to socialize and educate remain important secondary themes" (1198). While about community gardens rather than parks, this study offers insight into what motivates stewardship.

Others have investigated different aspects of engagement with natural areas. In *Fear and fascination: Use and perceptions of New York City's forests, wetlands, and landscaped park areas,* the authors explore who uses natural areas

in NYC, and how they use them. They found that use varies by gender, with men more likely to use natural areas alone and women more likely to use parks accompanied by children. The authors posited that "environmental programming that includes stewardship (e.g. tree planting, invasive plant removal) or engagement activities (e.g. guided walks, nature discovery games) in particular may allow women and children to experience urban natural areas as safe environments that allow for both social interaction and solitary reflection and restoration" (Sonti et al. 7). The authors report that "people who participate in environmental stewardship groups are more likely to visit urban natural areas than those who do not engage in stewardship" (1). There is thus a likely flow-on benefit from engaging park users in stewardship, encouraging them to visit and use other natural areas.

Finally, in *A social assessment of urban parkland: Analyzing park use and meaning to inform management and resilience planning*, the authors studied use of a park in Jamaica Bay, Queens. They found nine primary themes for why people visit the park, three of which stand out for this project. The most common reason to visit was that the park is local to their home. The third most common was the ability to connect with the outdoors, and about 6% of respondents reported they came to the park to do activities, including stewardship (40). Again, this points to why people visit parks and provides useful content for a theater piece encouraging participation in stewardship activities.

The Places

My first choice of location was Socrates Sculpture Park in Astoria, Queens. Socrates is my local park, and I am particularly interested in how people engage in stewardship near their homes. Socrates hosts both temporary and permanent sculptures on its grounds, making it an ideal location for implementation because it is already a site of both nature and art. In terms of geography, Socrates is a small park (five acres, or about the size of one square NYC block) on the East River, across from Roosevelt Island. It has a large central lawn, a grove of silver birch trees, groupings of other trees spread throughout, and landscaping around the perimeter.

Additionally, Socrates Sculpture Park has a history of activism and artivism.[3] The park was the brainchild of sculptors Isamu Noguchi and Mark di Suvero, both of whom had studios near the site (Noguchi died in 1988, and his former studio is now the Noguchi Museum). In the 1980s, the site was mostly a site of illegal dumping, but the two of them envisioned a sculpture park instead. After the city granted temporary permission, hundreds of neighborhood volunteers helped clear the site and the first exhibition was held in 1986. In 1998 "New York City… sided with artists and their allies over developers and [made] Socrates Sculpture Park… a permanent park" (Martin 1998).

In addition to Socrates's founding by artists and community activists, works inside the park have also often contained political messages. For instance, in 2017 sculptor Nari Ward's exhibition "G.O.A.T, again" included a piece called

[3] "[P]assion [that] has all the ingredients of activism, but is charged with the wild creations of art. Artivism — where edges are pushed, imagination is freed, and a new language emerges altogether" (Ensler).

"Scapegoat," a "40-foot-long hobby horse with a giant goat's head, a parody of virility and monuments to political leaders typically in public spaces" (Sheets C2). Socrates has also hosted theatrical performance, including "Odysseus at Hell Gate," a commissioned, site-specific work that reimagined *The Odyssey* "restaged through the lens of New York City history" (Ryzik C1) and "The (re)Cycle Plays," a take on morality plays by Confluence Theater Company that consisted of "a schedule of short plays, dance pieces, and musical performances based on environmental themes… [with] sets and props… made from recycled, reusable, and salvaged materials" (The New York Times). Socrates's rich history of art and community activism, coupled with its proximity to my home, made it the perfect site for my sessions.

Central Park is entirely different. One of the most famous parks in the world, Central Park was created by an act of the New York State Legislature in 1858. Unlike Socrates, which was formed out of a movement by artists and community members to reclaim land for public and artistic use, the 775 acres of land set aside by the New York State Legislature for Central Park were seized from communities through eminent domain. The law creating Central Park in 1858 displaced around 1,600 inhabitants, including those of Seneca Village, one of the few African American enclaves at that time (Central Park Conservancy). The board of commissioners of Central Park was careful to note that "its paramount object is to offer facilities for a daily enjoyment of life to the industrious thousands who are working steadily and conscientiously"– not to encourage laziness or to be used by "idlers and drones" (Miller 18). Rather than

embracing the increasingly diverse population of the city, or with free public use in mind, Central Park "was conceived as a space of exception, isolated and protected from the rough-and-tumble of the street commons" (Sevilla-Buitrago 152). Despite those intentions, Central Park has become a place where thousands of people from all walks of life visit, relax, and enjoy nature every day.

My implementation site was in the northeast corner of the park, near East Harlem, where we visited the Conservatory Garden and the Harlem Meer. The garden has three distinct gardens areas, each with their own fountain (New York Times 46). While the Conservatory Garden is an example of formal gardening and highly structured plantings, the Harlem Meer, named after the Dutch word for lake, lies on the other end of the spectrum. It is a large body of water, and, like many parts of Central Park, is designed to appear as an untouched natural area. It is stocked with freshwater fish and is allegedly the best spot for catch-and-release fishing in the park (Miller 126).

The People

I led three implementations of my project. The first was for the stewardship team of NYC Parks. These are the people who assist stewardship volunteers, helping them engage in the work depicted in, and encouraged by, my theater piece. I had twenty-three participants, mostly aged 25 to 45, with a diverse racial makeup and wide-ranging levels of education. The second session was part of a quarterly series of events run by City Science Lab and led by artists, invited guests, or scientists. I had fourteen attendees, most of them appearing between 25 and 55 years old, racially diverse with a perceived (by me) white majority, many

of whom held postgraduate degrees. I was especially interested in the perspective of the stewardship team and the scientists on the effectiveness of the theatrical form, potential for improvement, and value for community implementation.

The final implementation was for a group of nine students from a private university in Brooklyn, NY, along with their professor, involved in a course exploring socio-ecological practice. The students came from a range of disciplines, with three MFA students, three BFA students, an Architecture student and two MA students. By my observation, the ages clustered around mid-twenties, but ranged from approximately early twenties to early fifties. The school reports among the student body a population of 27% male and 73% female and racial/ethnic makeups of 49% 'international,' 27% white, 9% Hispanic, 8% Asian, and less than 1% Black, multi-ethnic, or Native Hawaiian or Pacific Islander.[4] I perceived that the group was majority white-appearing. Based on the pronouns shared, there was a range of gender identities. I was particularly interested to hear feedback and impressions from the students, who are more likely to represent potential public visitors to the parks in their baseline knowledge of stewardship activities in NYC Parks.

Description of the Facilitator

I was the main facilitator for this project, joined by an assistant facilitator on two occasions. I am a white, non-disabled,[5] neurotypical, thin, queer, non-

[4] To protect the privacy of participants and the anonymity of the school, I have not provided a full citation in Works Cited.

[5] I paused before typing disabled, since I'm not even sure that it is the best term to use; I know there is debate within the relevant communities. In other words, I am not living with a disability.

binary and trans, middle class, 34-year-old person whose first (and only fluent) language is English. I possess United States and New Zealand citizenship and I have benefited from generational wealth in that I am educated and have no student debt. In terms of Audre Lorde's 'mythical norm,' I am also Christian-adjacent, with a strong strain of Polish Catholicism on one side of my family and a less strong but still weighty Protestant tradition on the other.

As I dive into questions of oppression, privilege, and power, I have come to believe that being a white person in the United States (and in many other places) outweighs many other forms of oppression. As people with power, I believe white people must actively take anti-racist action to create a more equitable world. This work needs to take place both systemically (e.g. the justice system, education) and on an individual level (e.g. unlearning racist assumptions, stereotypes, and thought patterns). The adverb 'actively' is key. As Freire describes, "just as objective social reality exists not by chance, but as the product of social action, so it is not transformed by chance. If humankind produce social reality…then transforming that reality is an historical chance, a task for humanity" (51). I commit to this praxis in this project, even though it is not overtly about race or racism.

I also hold less power in that I identify with the queer (LGBTQIA+) and the trans and gender diverse community. At the same time, in the United States especially, I feel that my racial (white) and class (middle) identity tends to eclipse everything else in terms of privilege and power. I also have "passing privilege" regarding my gender and sexuality. While my appearance does not completely fit

the norms of binary gender or heterosexual identity (and I do not aim for it to do so), it is possible for people who don't want to 'see' my gender or sexuality to ignore the signifiers I present. For instance, someone who was homophobic or transphobic might ignore the queer signifiers in my appearance. The number of times I've been referred to as a "nice young lady" makes this very clear to me. People can choose what they want to see.

With recognition of the ways that I am privileged, I am left wondering what this means for my work. It means that I need to be conscious of the language I use and the actions I take. It means when I am working with people unlike myself to consider why and when I speak, and it means that I need to listen as much as I might offer my thoughts or opinions.

Research Methods and Evaluation

For my research I drew from Theater Action Research (TAR). As articulated by James Thompson in *Applied Theatre: Bewilderment and Beyond*, theater can itself be a research process. "It is a means for understanding, analyzing, interpreting, and proposing, done by people who occupy the ground. *Theatre* is an *action* that is *research*" (122). Practitioners often work within communities to address problems together, like how I worked with scientists. Thompson also emphasizes how TAR requires that "action and research, words that would usually be separated as two distinct moments, are brought together within the same social process…Theatre action research (TAR) must also see itself as part of a spiral, not a neatly completing circle" (124). Actions are critically examined for their potential for change, then another iteration is

attempted, and so on. Instead of seeking a perfect solution, TAR is used by communities to examine options, much as artist and scientists in this project examined how to use applied theater to activate people to engage in stewardship.

Participatory Action Research (PAR) and Youth Participatory Action Research (YPAR) also offer insights for my work. PAR focuses on understanding the world through acting upon it: engaging through critical action, critical reflection, and transformative inquiry (Malorni et al.). As Park articulates, "participatory research is aimed at both generating knowledge and producing action, in common with other forms of action-oriented research which, unlike most research, is driven by practical outcomes rather than theoretical understanding" (143). PAR has been used to analyze a range of topics relevant to this project. One study examined the use of urban public space, reporting that in green spaces,

> Participants enjoy better air quality, sunshine, and greenery in these open areas and express that such areas provide a place to breathe and rest, help calm their minds, and release stress amidst the 'concrete jungle' (hyper-dense urban environment). Many participants mention that public spaces make them 'feel better' and 'happier.' (Cheung et al. 80)

Another study sought to reimagine urban environmental education by working with youth who lived in those urban environments (Bellino). A third used PAR to record indigenous knowledge of seasonal changes to monitor and adapt to environmental change in the face of the climate crisis, as well as to pass along indigenous knowledge to younger generations (McNamara and

McNamara), while a fourth studied how PAR could be used to engage EE teachers, deepening their teaching practice towards a focus on action rather than knowledge (Paredes-Chi and Viga-de Alva).

While still new, there is also an argument to be made for Applied Theater as Research (ATAR). As Peter O'Connor and Michael Anderson describe in *Applied Theater Research: Radical Departures*, "ATAR calls first and foremost for a politically and socially committed approach that requires research to be responsive to and driven by each unique setting" (47). The authors make the case for ATAR as a distinct methodology as "an act of political and cultural resistance that creates through the fictional frame a set of propositions that are co-constructed, analyzed, and then re-presented to communities as a method of creating new knowledge and forging social change" (49). Like TAR, this spiral model allows research to be co-created with participants, creating new knowledge in the process. All these methodologies underpin my project, and the ways in which I hoped to work with participants.

Chapter 2: Implementation

Session One: Central Park

Session one was for the Stewardship team of NYC Parks. My original session plan was designed for Socrates Sculpture Park in Astoria, but spring proved a busy time for the stewardship team, and fitting in a visit to Astoria was a challenge. Instead, I accepted the invitation to join them in early March during a scheduled training in Central Park, near El Museo del Barrio in East Harlem. I visited Central Park before the session, and quickly determined that the location change would require a change in approach. This also meant I could test my goal of creating a project modular enough to travel to parks around New York City.

Socrates is a much smaller and more urban park, with a clear community connection through the Free Store and stewardship activities both within the park itself, and in Hallet's Cove immediately to the north. There was no obvious match for the Free Store or Hallet's Cove in Central Park, so I focussed the Central Park implementation on stewardship of natural areas. In order to bring in more community connection, I identified a nearby vegetarian cafe to connect to the concept of generativity,[6] volunteering to increase the wellbeing of future generations. Within the drama, I had Mary purchase a plant for her niece from the cafe. The vegetarian cafe, along with the bag carrying her belongings – from an organic store in Astoria – also tied to ecoconciousness. Neither of these aspects were explicit, but both could be inferred by participants.

[6] Generativity is the propensity and willingness to engage in acts that promote the wellbeing of younger generations as a way of ensuring the long-term survival of the species. (Flett)

The Central Park implementation had four stops on the walk. The first was the meeting point, where I introduced participants to the character of Mary, our steward. The second was the nearby vegetarian cafe and plant store. We then visited Harlem Meer, a large pond in the northwest corner of the park, and finished at a statue and fountain in the Conservatory Garden. The Central Park implementation also differed from the original plan because one of the stewardship team stepped in to 'become' Mary, rather than having the character played by a trained actor-facilitator. This mainly happened out of necessity, since the session was confirmed on short notice and I wasn't able to recruit a second actor-facilitator. While unplanned, this change proved a useful and informative contrast to having an actor-facilitator in the role – as described below.

Session One Thick Description

As I approached the stewardship group, their leader welcomed me and I introduced myself, explaining that I was both an artist-in-residence with City Science Lab and a Masters student. After giving a short definition of applied theater for context, I explained that I would appreciate their feedback as experts on stewardship. I got their consent to record feedback, then introduced the project. Finally, I asked that they engage as if they were members of the public who had decided to attend a workshop about stewardship. Introductions done, I jumped into the session.

"It's so good to see you!" I began. I explained that I needed their help. I had found a bag and I wanted to figure out who it belonged to, as there was no ID or wallet. We started our inquiry with the bag itself. It was from a store in Astoria;

some group members posited that the person might live there. When asked why someone might use a reuseable supermarket bag, participants offered that the person could be interested in the environment. Moving from the bag to its contents, I pulled out a cultivator. “What could this be for?” I wondered. Maybe a back scratcher, or maybe for gardening, suggested the participants. They also noticed that it appeared rather new, and had the name ‘Mary’ written on the handle. We had a name!

Next, I pulled out a small paper bag with ‘To Stacey, with love, Aunt Mary’ written on it. We had a second confirmation of the name! Inside this bag was a small air plant and a coaster from BGC Cafe. “I know that cafe!” one participant exclaimed. They explained that it is a vegetarian cafe around the corner. “Should we go there?” I asked. The group enthusiastically agreed, and we were off to our second stop.

On our walk, I overheard participants discussing what they could figure out from what we had already seen. It seemed like she was probably a vegetarian, and maybe into organic food given the bag from an organic supermarket. Maybe we would find her in the cafe, they offered. All of us couldn’t fit inside the cafe, so I said I would see if Mary was there. As I went inside, some of the group discussed the cafe excitedly. Now that they knew it was there, they had a new option for lunch!

After briefly chatting to the person at the register, I grabbed a few menus for the group and went back outside. Sadly, Mary was not there, I reported, but the cafe worker had seen her that morning. There was a murmer from the group.

"Let's see what else is in the bag," I offered, and they agreed. The next object was a library book about the history of Central Park. "We're close to the Park!" a few people pointed out. I gave the book to one of them, who started flipping through it. "There's a check in here!" they exclaimed, and said it was made out to 'Mary Smith' for music lessons. A musician, the group concluded. It hadn't been cashed – and it was for two hundred and forty dollars. We needed to get this bag back to Mary! They then noticed that the check bookmarked a page about the Harlem Meer. "I know where that is!" more participants chimed in. I asked if anyone could take us, and someone volunteered. Before we left, they noticed something else in the book – a registration for a seed saving workshop from last August. "It's a workshop organized by GreenThumb," someone pointed out. GreenThumb run the community gardens in New York. Perhaps Mary was a community gardener? "Perhaps we could track the IP address," someone suggested. "Perhaps we should go to Harlem Meer," I deflected, which got a few laughs, and we set off.

On the way, a few people mentioned how much fun they were having, and the group was chatting away as we walked to the Meer. The general feeling of the group was jovial – people were having a good time and enjoying themselves. Intentionally, one of the participants was in the lead, and people asked them about where we were headed. Not only did it feel good to not have to be in front and in charge, but it meant that someone else was put into the role of expert.

At the Harlem Meer, we gathered around the sign describing the upcoming renovations. I asked why someone might come to the Meer. Fishing, perhaps. Or boating? A group member offered that Harlem Meer was well known for fishing,

so maybe Mary liked to fish – for sport, not for eating. We could look for buskers, came another suggestion. We know she's a musician, so perhaps she is busking around here. We looked, but there weren't any to be seen. We discussed how volunteers contribute to both the Meer and Central Park as a whole before I suggested we look inside the bag again, and pulled out the final item - a postcard. I handed it to the nearest partipant, who read out the place: B&H Kosher Vegetarian Restaurant. A few people sighed in recognition. "I know that restaurant!" someone exclaimed. "It's the famous Kosher vegetarian one, it's really good." "So she must be a vegetarian after all," another said.

Now the person holding the card read the message on it. 'Dear Mary, Happy birthday! I hope you don't mind me using a postcard as a birthday card. I hope you like the flowers, and I'd love to take you to this restaurant sometime. It's one of my favorite places in New York and I'd love to show you – just like you showed me that lovely fountain of 3 girls that you took me to in C.P.! Lots of love, Naomi.' "Oh," the reader said, "C.P. must be Central Park." "I think I've seen that fountain," someone mused. Another pointed, "I think it's just over there." "Can you take us?" I asked. They agreed, and we were off to our last stop.

"This is where we would normally meet Mary," I said when we reached the fountain, "but I wasn't able to get another facilitator in time." I was prepared to step into role as Mary, but then came the most magical part of the session. The leader of the group offered, "One of us could do it! Any volunteers?" The participant who led us to the Meer stepped forward, and was cheered on by the

group. “Okay,” I said. I quickly stepped back into role. “Mary, we’re so glad we found you! Here’s your bag, and we have a few questions for you.”[7]

Our volunteer took up the mantle of Mary with ease. She gushed about how grateful she was that we returned her bag. When asked what the cultivator was for, she told us about her stewardship activities, and how she was given the rake in honor of her volunteering. She described how she got interested in street tree care because of the heat island effect, and how it helped control the temperature in apartments, and shared her interest in seed saving and beautifying tree beds. When asked about being a musician she talked about teaching violin and piano. She shared information on how we could all volunteer, and spoke about how she had gotten more involved over time. When I closed the session, everyone applauded. She had done an amazing job, and she could feel it. I was touched both by how much enjoyment everyone got from the roleplay with her, and how she was able to step into a new leadership role on her team.

For the last part of the session, we returned indoors for the art activity and feedback. I passed around the release form. To my surprise, a few people expressed interest in reading the final product – including my brave volunteer ‘Mary.’ As the form went around I explained the art activity. We were going to decorate envelopes, I told them, to fill with wildflower seeds and give to someone special with whom they’d like to plant them. While they were decorating their envelopes, I said that I would also ask a few reflection questions; I then turned on my recorder.

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[7] This was an intentional set up of the ‘Hot-seating’ referenced in Chapter One.

Our reflection session was brief, but it did give them enough time to create beautiful envelopes covered in flowers and leaves, addressed to specific people or, following my sample envelope, with “will you be my planting buddy?” I finished by walking around the table, giving a pinch of wildflower seeds to each person. Thanking them for their time and energy, I packed up as they transitioned into the next part of their day.

Session Two: Socrates Sculpture Park

Session two was implemented for the Salon run by the City Science Lab for scientists and artists. It was my chance to facilitate the experience as originally planned, in Socrates Sculpture Park. I designed the session with five stops. We would meet in the middle of the park, visit Hallet’s Cove, check in at Chateau Le Woof (a cafe across the road), visit the Free Store, and finish at a sculpture, where we would meet our steward, Mary.

Session Two Thick Description

I met the group in the middle of Socrates Sculpture Park at 9am in mid-March. It was a cold morning, and we were all bundled up. Since this was a part of a series of meetings between scientists and artists, but with different attendees each time, we started with a check in. I chose the question “what is something unusual you have seen in an outdoor setting that made you wonder?” The answers were more detailed and varied than I expected. They included a bag of animal organs found in a NYC park, a calcified diaper on the beach, and an deteriorating Chinese pagoda in the woods in suburban New Jersey. Interestingly, many participants connected these stories to their own interest in stewardship or other

work in natural areas. It felt like we learned about each person's life as they shared, and about how humans treat natural areas.

The last few participants joined as we finished our check in, and the session began. As in the first session, I began by introducing myself and the thesis project, as well as passing around the consent form. I explained the context of applied theater, and I invited them to be 'in role' as members of the public. With the formalities completed, it was time to jump in.

"It's so good to see you all!" I began. "I found this bag, and I was hoping you could help me figure out who it belongs to so that we can return it." Again, we analyzed the bag, noting that it was from a nearby supermarket. "What do we think we know about this person based on this bag?" I asked. They're a local, one participant offered. Next I pulled out the cultivator. A few people said it was probably for gardening. One participant noted that her grandmother had one. It made its way all the way around the circle before a participant noticed the name on the handle. "Mary!" she exclaimed, delighted. "So we think this is for gardening, and might belong to someone named Mary," I affirmed. "Let's see what else is in the bag."

The second item was a book about an artist and urban planner collaboration at Socrates Sculpture Park. The group quickly noticed that it was about the Park, and saw that there was a postcard in it. This postcard depicted a woodcut with the saying 'We're all Downstream' on one side, and writing on the back. A participant read it aloud. "Dear Mary, I found this in Oregon. Made me think of our trips to the cove. I hope you don't mind a postcard as a birthday card

– and happy, happy birthday! Love, Sal." It's marking a section in the book on Hallet's Cove," a participant remarked. Another pointed to the cove: "It's over there." I asked if she could take us, and she agreed. We were off to stop number two. Listening to the group on our short walk over, there were already some murmurs of excitement. What was going to happen? This was fun!

At Hallet's Cove, we gathered on the sand and looked around. "I didn't even know this cove was here!" someone exclaimed. The group were eagerly investigating, debating what could be a clue. On the left side were posters about the Kin to the Cove group. "Who are they?" I asked. We learned from other members that they were a group of artists who did artistic interventions and environmental activism at Hallet's Cove. "Why might someone come here?" I asked. To enjoy the water, or because there are so few places along the shoreline to access the water, a few people posited. To watch birds, another suggested, pointing out the birds in the water. "Is that Mary?" one participant asked me, pointing to a woman sitting near the water with a bag by her side. "No, I think she has her bag," I replied. It was amazing how the suggestion of a mystery turned everything into a possible clue!

After a few minutes of conversation, and more looking around, I brought us back together. I could sense a slight disappointment that we hadn't found a clue, but I brought our attention back to the bag. "Let's see what else is in here," I offered. I pulled out an old fashioned pitch pipe. "What do we think this is?" I asked. The group passed it around. They noted that it was probably for making music, since there were musical notes on the outside. Then someone recognized it

– it was for singing! “Do we know how it works?” I asked. Another group member blew into it, making a few tones. Some of the group were intrigued, having never seen one before. “What do we think this might mean about Mary?” I asked. Probably a singer, they all agreed. Maybe a musician. “She’s probably old,” another participant unexpectedly offered, pointing out the age of the pitch pipe. “Perhaps,” I replied.

At this point it was only around 9:45am, and still very cold, even if it wasn’t raining. We had been outside for almost an hour. I hadn’t decided yet whether we were going to visit the cafe, but I thought it was probably a good idea to take a short inside break. I opened the bag one more time, and pulled out a package of coffee from Chateau Le Woof. “Here’s something else,” I offered. “Oh, she’s definitely a millennial!” The participant who thought Mary was old changed her mind at the sight of the ‘hipster’ packaging. “It’s from Chateau Le Woof,” someone noticed. Right across the street! I decided to take a risk, and introduce the unknown element of the cafe workers into the drama. “Shall we ask the staff if they know whose bag this is?” I asked. The group agreed.

As we entered the cafe I could see a few of the group relax in the warmth. “Feel free to order something,” I said as I went to the counter. Aware that the participants could hear me, I explained that we had found a bag and were trying to find the owner. The staff looked a little confused, until I showed them the bag of coffee. “Oh, we know him! He was in here this morning,” one replied “He’s a regular. We can hold on to the bag if you want.” I demurred. I couldn’t give up Mary’s bag, and they definitely didn’t know the fictional person that it belonged

to. “We’ll go look outside,” I replied. The participant closest to me leaned in. “He?” she asked. “I’m sure we’ll find her,” I replied quickly. As a few people ordered drinks, I went around to the groups that formed in the space to let them know that the cafe people had seen Mary that morning – apparently she was a regular – but she wasn’t in now. Maybe we could still find her, though! This information was accepted without question, and I could see that they had bought into the drama by their reactions, even making comments like “I can’t believe we missed her!”

It was time for the final clue. Going to one of the small groups, I showed them a Post-It with “Books for the Free Store” written on it. “This is the last thing in the bag,” I told them. What could it mean? The group debated. Hadn’t someone mentioned a free store in the Park? Maybe someone knew where it was! I showed the Post-It to the other groups. Someone who lived nearby offered to take us to the Free Store on the other side of Socrates Park. I checked that everyone got their drinks, gathered up my now-warm group, and asked our new leader to take us to the Free Store.

Crossing through the Park, we marvelled at the current sculpture installation. It was a relaxed walk, with the group chatting amongst themselves before we gathered around the Free Store. We knew that she had left books here – but which ones? There were five shelves of books. The first ones that they pulled out were about sculpture and gardnening, but the book I placed as a clue was *Shakespeare’s Songbook,* knowing Mary was a singer. As they went through more and more books without finding the clue, I asked, “what do we know about

Mary that might help us guess which book she left?" They pulled out a music book and more sculpture books. "Maybe there's a book about singing...." I suggested. Finally, someone grabbed it. They rifled through the pages until they looked at the inside of the front cover. "It says Mary! And there's a phone number." "I'll call her," I offered quickly. I stepped aside and called my fellow facilitator. "Mary?" I asked. As agreed, I told her we'd found her bag and 'learned' that she was in the park, inside one of the sculptures. "We'll come over and give you your bag," I offered, "see you soon." "She's just over on the other side of the park!"I announced to the group. "Let's give her bag back." They agreed enthusiastically.

We walked to the orange sculpture on the other side of the park. It was shaped like a half circle, about twelve feet tall with seating on the inside, where, as we rounded the corner of the sculpture we found "Mary!" Mary, played by my fellow facilitator Marcela, greeted us enthusiastically. "Thank you so much for finding my bag," she said. She welcomed us inside the sculpture, inviting us to sit down. She had set out a number of art supplies on a blanket. We filed in, most sitting in the natural semi-circle created by the sculpture. Mary opened the bag, talking about how grateful she was to receive her items back, noting each as she discovered it: the cultivator, the book, the pitch pipe, and the postcard from Sal. "I think we might have some questions for you," I offered, opening the floor for participants to engage with Mary.

The group first asked about the cultivator – what did she do with it? Mary replied that she was involved in tree care, loosening up the soil around the base of

trees as a steward for NYC Parks. She told us how she loved being outside in nature, and how it was something that she did with Sal, who she met volunteering. The cultivator, in fact, had been a birthday gift from Sal last week. And what about the pitch pipe? Mary explained that she was a teaching artist who did music and singing with her students. A participant asked if she could sing for us – Mary demurred. "Maybe we could all sing together instead?" I suggested. "What's a song we all knew?" Someone suggested we sing Mary happy birthday. Mary demurred again, but the group insisted. "Give us a tone on the pitch pipe!" one participant prompted. "Everyone starts at different notes with 'Happy Birthday,'" I interjected, knowing that Marcela wasn't actually a singing teacher. The group joined in, and we sang happy birthday to Mary.

Finally, the group asked Mary what she was doing in the park. She explained that she was about to do an art project, which she had come to prep at Socrates. "You can help me see if it works!" she offered as she explained the activity, inviting everyone to decorate envelopes to give seeds to someone they would like to invite to be their 'planting buddy.' This time, we distributed cards as well as envelopes, so that they could write a note to their planting buddy. As I walked around distributing seeds, I noticed participants deeply engaged in the activity. I asked a few people who they were writing to, and I heard "my daughter," "my neighbor," and "my family."

With only fifteen minutes left, I called for a pause and invited participants to de-role and rejoin us – while completing their envelopes – as themselves to give feedback. I missed the opportunity to have the participants share with each

other what they had written and to whom, but I wanted to make sure that I could gather feedback in order to incorporate a scientific perspective on the project.

Session Three: Socrates Sculpture Park, Take Two

Session three was for the student group and their professor. It gave me a chance to build on what I'd learnt through sessions one and two, while continuing to work at Socrates Sculpture Park. With three weeks between sessions two and three, I decided to make a few changes. Inspired by the stewardship team member who stepped into role as Mary in session one, and following feedback from the scientists after session two (covered more in depth in Chapter Three), I decided to invite a NYC Parks volunteer steward to join the drama as the owner of the bag, replacing the fictional 'Mary' with a real life volunteer named Nicola. In order to allow Nicola – not a trained actor or facilitator – to jump into the drama, I made some changes to the script and structure. First, I asked Nicola what she liked doing in natural areas, and who she might do outdoor activities with. She shared that she loved bird watching and identifying trees, and that I could use the name Anna for someone that a postcard could be from, facts that I worked into the scavenger hunt so she could play herself in the drama instead of learning a role. Since previous participants had shared how great it was to see stewards as regular people, I told her that I wanted her to be herself, not someone who had to know everything about stewardship or the park system. It was totally fine, even useful, to not know an answer or point people to a website for more information. While this may have removed the aesthetic distance for Nicola, it didn't affect the dramatic frame for participants and they remained in role as themselves – and

speaking to Nicola afterwards, she expressed that she would love to do it again if the opportunity arose.

For session three I also changed our final location and the facilitation of our arts-based activity. I still planned for us to meet in the middle of the park, visit Hallet's Cove, stop by Chateau le Woof, and visit the free store, but instead of meeting Nicola at a sculpture we would finish at the southern entrance to the park. This was partly because Socrates was in the midst of changing its temporary exhibition, so the sculpture we used before no longer existed. I also decided to facilitate the final arts-based activity, removing that responsibility from Nicola.

Finally, before the session I met with a scientist colleague who manages volunteer stewards. I wanted to learn more about the stewardship program, as well as get a management perspective on Socrates. We met at Chatea la Woof, and after discussing management practices and invasive plants we walked in the park. He shared interesting facts about plants and trees, as well as debates about invasive plantings and general management of natural areas. Our conversation was informative, and many of the facts he shared with me I passed on during the session, to great interest from participants.

Session Three Thick Description

I met my third group near the southern entrance to Socrates Park at 10am in early April. The sun was starting to come out and the weather was much warmer than the previous session, with some already in short sleeves. A few people were running late, and we started by sharing where we had come from that morning – mostly Brooklyn – as well as our names and pronouns. At around ten

past their professor suggested we get started (a few more people trickled in throughout the session). I brought everyone to the picnic tables by the Eternal Flame sculpture, and breifly explained applied theater and my research. I then passed around a consent form, had each participant sign it, and we began. Since they were not scientists, I didn't need to invite them to get 'into role' as members of the public. Instead, they were entering as heightened versions of themselves.

"I'm so glad you're here!" I once again enthused. "I found this bag. Do you think you could help me figure out who it might belong to?" There were some nods, a few slightly hesitant. "Does that sound okay?" I asked again. More nods. I invited them to look at the bag. The participants again noticed that all the locations of the supermarket were local, and inferred that the owner might live around here, and could return for the bag. "Does anyone here have a bag like this?" I asked. A participant said it looked like the type of bag they would buy at the grocery store when they forget to bring a reuseable bag. Others agreed, offering their own experiences with reuseable bags. "I found this bag right here, in the park," I reiterated. "Why might someone come and spend time here?" We looked around. "To spend time in a natural area," one participant offered. "If you work here," someone else added. I asked if anyone had been to Socrates before. None had, so I gave them a very brief history of the park. Bringing us back to the bag, I asked "Do you think we could look inside for clues?" The group assented, with one participant responding a little archly, "I think we might have to." Rather than being offended, I appreciated the recognition of the dramatic context –

everyone here knew that we were operating in a heightened, and playful, reality. I reached into the bag for our first item.

I held up the cultivator. “What do we think this is?” I asked, then handed it to the person on my right. “It’s for gardening,” they said. “Really? Have you used one?” I replied. “Yes,” came the answer, as they passed the cultivator around the circle. “It’s for loosening the soil,” they added. I asked for more information. “For aeration,” they replied, adding “it helps oxygen get to the roots of the plants.” Another participant chimed in. “We don’t do that anymore, tilling is bad for the soil and all the top soil will be gone soon.” I paused. I loved that she was sharing an ecological persepective on large-scale agriculture, and she wasn’t necessarily wrong, but that was a very different context. I didn’t want to correct her, but I did want to keep the group focused on relevant information. “Is that on the macro or micro level?” I asked. “Macro,” she replied. “Okay, so maybe it’s okay to aerate soil as a gardener but it might have repercussions for large scale agriculture,” I offered. “Great. What else do we notice about this tool, beside that it might be for loosening soil?” Another participant observed that it looked pretty new, and someone else noted the name on the handle – Nicola. “So maybe this cultivator belongs to someone named Nicola, who might like gardening” I offered. “Shall we see what else is in the bag?” There was general assent.

Next up was the book about Socrates Park, *Civic Action: with the Noguchi Museum and Socrates Sculpture Park*. I had preset two items inside: the printout about the seed saving workshop last August, and a postcard marking the chapter about Hallet’s Cove, to help guide us to our next stop. “There’s a book in here!” I

exclaimed. This time, I handed it to my left. “Can you read us the title?” After reading it, the participant discovered the print out about the seed saving workshop, quickly flipped through and pulled out the postcard as well, closing the book behind it. “There’s something about seed saving and a postcard. It sounds like we need to wish Nicola a happy birthday,” he remarked. “What does the postcard say?” I asked. He read, “Dear Nicola, Happy birthday! I hope you don’t mind a postcard as a birthday card – it made me think of our walk in Socrates; you are so good at identifying trees! Happy birthday again, and let’s go birdwatching soon! Love, Anna.” He finished and started passing all three items around the circle.

As this was happening I reassessed. The participant who opened the book missed that the postcard marked a particular page, and if I wanted us to go to Hallet’s Cove I would have to plant that seed myself (no pun intended). I decided that, if necessary, I could “report” that the cafe worker had noticed Nicola going towards the beach from the cafe. I dove back into the play. “Did you say seed saving? So it does sound like Nicola is a gardener,” I offered. “What’s seed saving?” a participant asked. I explained that it was when you let a plant flower and set seed, then harvest the seeds and dry them for later use. The participants nodded. I was glad my botanical knowledge was coming in handy.

I brought our attention back to the bag. “There’s not a lot more in this bag,” I noted, “but there is this.” I brought out the coffee. “Does anyone else drink coffee?” I asked, to enthusiastic nodding. As we passed the coffee around, one participant read the front of the bag. “Chateau le Woof.” There was a murmur of

recognition. “We were there just this morning,” someone noted. “Oh, you know where it is?” I replied. “Yes, it’s just over there,” came the answer. “Maybe Nicola was there while you were!” I exclaimed. “Or maybe she’s back there now looking for the bag. Shall we take a look?” The response came quickly. “Yes!” I asked the participants who had been there to lead us, and we headed off.

Arriving at the cafe, I went straight up to the counter. “Do you have a regular named Nicola?” I asked the slightly bemused-looking cafe worker at the till. “No, I don’t think so,” he replied. I reported back to the group. Nicola wasn’t here, but if anyone wanted coffee now was their chance. A few participants took me up on the offer, and while they were getting drinks I checked my watch. It was already almost 10:30am, the time that I had asked Nicola to arrive for her section of the drama. We started a little late, and I hadn’t anticipated so many questions about each item. I decided that, in the interest of honoring Nicola’s time, we would forego the Cove and instead head directly to the Free Store. I texted Nicola to let her know we would be arriving around 10:45am and returned to the drama. When everyone had their drinks, I announced, “I think we need to keep looking. Let’s head back outside.” Once there, I pulled each item out of the bag and handed it to a different person, briefly recapping what we had learned as I did so.

“There’s not much else in this bag,” I noted as I got to the bottom. But wait! There was the Post-It. I handed it to a participant. “What does it say?” I asked. “Books for the Free Store,” they read out. “Oh, the free store in the park!” another participant responded. “There’a a Free Store in the park?” I asked. They replied in the affirmative – they had passed it on their walk around the park

earlier. I asked if they could take us, and they agreed. We were headed towards our last clue! As we walked over, a participant was clearly enjoying their drink, and commented “Nicola has great taste in coffee.” I appreciated both their enjoyment and the indication of buy-in to our dramatic activity.

On our way to the Free Store Nicola texted to say she was sitting on a large stone with her bike. As we got closer, I realized she was sitting almost directly in front of the Free Store. There was no way we could pass her without her seeing or hearing us and her bag. I thought quickly. We didn’t *need* to visit the Free Store (although I had planted the final clue there). I texted Nicola, describing my outfit and suggesting she could ‘recognize’ the bag as we walked past. As we approached, I saw her check her phone, and as we passed her I paused. I could see that she didn’t quite know what to do. “Is this your bag?” I asked. “I saw you looking at it...” Nicola jumped in. “Yes, it is, thank you! I’ve been looking for it,” she replied. “We’ve found Nicola!” I announced to the group. They seemed a little unsure of what to do, so I encouraged them to gather around. “We have a few questions for you,” I began. “We noticed a tool in the bag, and one of us,” I gestured to the person who made the comment about aerating soil, “thought that it might be for aerating soil. Is that what you use it for?” Nichole pulled out the cultivator and confirmed that, yes, it was for aerating soil, demonstrating how it would be used. “Do you have a garden? Where do you use it?” I asked, attempting to segue into her work in tree stewardship. “I would use it in my

brother's backyard, or in my work with street trees. I'm a Super Steward,[8]" she replied. "What's a Super Steward?" a participant asked. Perfect!

Nicola began talking about her work as a Super Steward. As she spoke, I could see both that she relaxed and the interest from the group increased. It felt like they hadn't fully understood what she was doing here, or how to interact with her, but Nicola's friendly demeanor and clear enthusiasm were bringing them in. They asked follow up questions about the types of stewardship and how to get involved; a couple expressed particular interest in street trees. Even though we missed two stops, I saw an opportunity to add a stop within the park, providing more hands-on learning. "Could you show us what you do? Maybe we could go have a look at the borders for invasive plants?" I asked. I pointed to the section I had previously visited. Nicola agreed, and we all walked over. As we walked, Nicola continued describing different invasive plants. I asked if any of our participants had done any volunteering in natural areas. Only one of them had, having planted trees with the US Forest Service. Yet I heard a lot of interest in getting involved in stewardship as Nicola spoke; perhaps this would be their 'gateway drug!'

At the planted area at the edge of the park, Nicola noted that there weren't a lot of invasives before bringing our attention to the English ivy nearby. She explained that while it looks pretty, it can actually kill trees. "So is that what you do in natural areas, go through and cut vines off of trees?" I prompted. She

[8] Super Stewards are volunteers with the NYC Parks Department. As the NYC Parks website describes, they "work independently by taking the lead on caring for their neighborhood parks and spreading the word about the benefits of nature in the city.

explained that yes, you could do that as a natural areas steward. You would get trained, she added, given some tools and a permit, and assigned to a natural area. "Then you can go anytime you want," she finished. "Do you need a lot of knowledge going in?" a participant asked. "No, they'll train you to do everything," Nicola replied. She explained that she had done all of the trainings, allowing her to do street tree care as well as work in larger natural areas and parks. A participant asked whether Nicola ever had a negative experience with the general public while doing volunteer work. No, she replied. Of course, she noted, the permit doesn't allow you to take out invasives on the street or in peoples' yards; it is designed for large natural areas.

"What about street tree care?" someone else asked. Nicola went into more detail, encouraging everyone to go to the website to find out more about volunteering in their neighborhood or even on their block. She expressed concern for the many street trees around, often covered in concrete or concrete blocks and subject to the whims of dogs. "I've also seen some really beautiful ones that people plant in," I remarked. Nicola agreed. "Even if there are invasives we generally leave them alone if they are cared for," she said. A few others shared that they had seen really lovely street tree beds in their own neighborhoods.

The conversation slowed again, and I took the opportunity to ask Nicola about identifying trees. Were there any around that were particularly interesting? It was difficult in early spring, she explained, because there is so little foliage. When there is more foliage they are a lot easier to identify. She pointed out some that were currently flowering. "I know something about that one! It's an invasive

species," I pointed to a tree with white flowers that I learned about on my recent visit with my scientist colleague. "Is that a Callery pear?" one of the participants asked. I confirmed that it was, and explained that it was a type of pear tree that was thought to be sterile and had been planted widely as an ornamental. It was more recently proven to be invasive, and was no longer being planted.[9] "They also smell like butter," the same participant offered. "Do they?" I replied. "Amazing. Shall we go smell them?" The group needed no more invitation, and we all – Nicola included – headed over to the Callery Pear to give it a sniff. Not very buttery, we concluded. "Maybe all the pollen is already gone," a participant offered. Even if the blossoms didn't smell like butter, it was fun to see everyone so engaged with the natural world. It's not every day that a group of adults sniff tree blossoms together!

After we finished with the Callery Pear we said goodbye to Nicola. She thanked us again for giving her bag back, and we all thanked her for sharing her knowledge. She then snuck the bag back to me and waved goodbye. "And that's the end of the drama," I announced. "Let's head back over to the picnic tables to do our arts activity and talk." The participants followed me and I set the supplies up on the table: pens and crayons and pastels, blank envelopes, an example envelope decorated with 'Will You Be My Planting Buddy?' and a packet of wildflower seeds. "I'd like to invite you to decorate an envelope of seeds for someone that you'd like to plant wildflowers with," I explained. I also let them

[9] "Bradford pear is a variety of Callery pear (Pyrus calleryana), an ornamental fruit tree that is wreaking havoc … Once established, Bradford pear chokes out many native trees and shrubs. It grows in many soil conditions and does not require high levels of soil fertility or quality, allowing it to grow in many places where other trees fail to survive or thrive." (Hogan and Walker)

know that the seeds were fine to plant in street tree beds, backyards, or on window sills, but that it was best to keep them out of managed natural areas. They dove right in to envelope decorating. “We’re now in the reflection part of the session,” I added. “If you have any questions, feel free to ask.”

The first part of the session was quiet, with everyone focusing on their envelope, with only a little bit of quiet side chatter. “Do you know who you’re going to give them to?” I asked the participant next to me. She told me that she was making two, one for each of her daughters. We got onto the subject of invasive species, and I said I knew where there was a Japanese Knotweed[10] in the park – a discovery from my walk with my scientist colleague. “You can see it from here. Would you like to go look at it?” I offered to one particularly engaged participant. She said yes, and I walked her over. Before I knew it, the entire group had joined us, eager to learn more. The discussion turned more broadly to how non-native plants could be helpful or harmful, and splintered into a few smaller lively conversations.

Aware that we were approaching the end of our time, I invited everyone to return to the picnic table. During the previous conversations participants came up to get wildflower seeds for their completed envelopes. I asked each who they wanted to be their planting buddy. The answers covered a range, from best friend to offspring to romantic partners. Everyone had someone to share the seeds with, or multiple someones. I offered seeds to anyone who hadn’t yet taken them, and

[10] Japanese Knotweed is a highly invasive, although edible, plant.

the last few people brought their envelopes to me. I also took the opportunity to take a photo of some of the envelopes.

After we had our debrief – discussed more in depth in Chapter Three – I explained that, in all transparency, we had skipped a clue in the Free Store. “What was the clue?” someone asked. Sensing their interest, I offered that we all go and find it. They enthusiastically agreed, and we went over to the Free Store. With only a little prompting they found the book supposedly left by Nicola – this time, one on hikes in the Hudson Valley – and after assiduously checking all of the dogeared pages in case there were clues, they opened the front page to find her name and number inside. They had now officially solved the mystery. I said my goodbyes, and left them to the rest of their day.

Chapter 3: Evaluation

To answer my thesis question, "How can I engage in dialogue with social and environmental scientists and parks staff to co-create an applied theater project?" I analyzed both the lead up to the project, and the process of implementing, reflecting on, and tweaking the project itself. I assessed how the project has, or has not, been developed in dialogue, drawing on statements made during the reflection periods after each session, as well as a separate reflection session with the scientists from City Science Lab.

For the project question, "How can roleplay activate communities towards engaging with local stewardship activities in natural areas?" there were three types of evaluation. The first was observing participants during the session. I also recorded feedback at the end of each session, allowing me to hear from participants what they took from the experience. Finally, the art pieces produced during the final part of the piece also provided data on what meaning participants made from the session. I drew great value from their reflections, which were often concurrent with the artmaking. I agree with Bolton's sentiment that "experience in itself is neither productive nor unproductive; it is how you reflect on it that makes it significant or not" (126).

After gathering my data, I coded it by creating charts that included themes, quotations, descriptions of the context, and identification of the speaker. I then borrowed from Anthony Jackson's concept of "theatrical frames" to analyze the different parts of the sessions (161).

In Dialogue Before Sessions

Dialogue with my scientist colleagues began as soon as I was accepted into the residency in June 2022. My initial pitch was called Applying a Queer Lens to Scientific Narratives. I wrote:

> From narratives of people who are not at all like us, to interesting shapes and colors, artists encourage us to look at the world differently, or sometimes just more closely. For this residency, I propose to…examine how a queer arts lens can encourage humans to notice and appreciate the social-ecological systems they are a part of. To do this, I will draw on my digital work placing modern queer voices into historically queer areas of NYC, as well as my work at the Auckland Botanic Gardens with drag performers interpreting summer blooms. (Upstill 2022)

Over the course of my series of on-line and in-person conversations with my partner scientists, my project evolved completely. For the first six months most of the meetings were online. I shared my general research interests and questions, and they responded with their questions and comments, including anything that they found particularly interesting or compelling. They also noted other people or places I could look for further information. While I retained my interest in networks and systems, I focused on how we care for the people and environment around us, drawing inspiration from mutual aid, rhizome networks, and stewardship.

I also became more interested in creating a real-time, real-world experience than a digital one. Much of this was due to our wonderful in-person

meetings that involved walking tours of their local neighborhoods; my colleagues shared not only their personal relationships with place, but also their scientific perspectives and insight into urban areas. These walks shaped how I began to see spaces as sites of active or inactive stewardship and care. The experience reminded me of when I became a gardener. Learning to identify plants turned a wash of green matter into fascinating individual plants, just as walking with these scientists made visible and identifiable the care put into a natural area.

As I was developing this project, I included their feedback and insights as much as possible. For instance, when I brought up the idea of creating something "fun," there was an immediate, enthusiastic response. I played with a few ideas for how to follow that thread, from a guided movement practice to some kind of clowning. I initially settled on the idea of a fully developed process drama, before realizing that a more flexible, multi-form approach would allow me to better embrace the outdoor setting. Bringing it back to the scientists' interest in fun led me to create a scavenger hunt. At each stage, I offered my ideas in our meetings, received feedback, and reevaluated.

Development of the Sessions

The feedback from the stewardship team in session one, and from the scientist and artist group in session two, led to concrete changes in session three. There were six direct instances of this. A suggestion in session one to include information about Socrates' history as an artificial landmass, constructed on top of trash and debris, led to the inclusion of a brief history of the site and its coastline in session three. Other participants in the same session recommended

"an extra call to action," (Participant. Stewardship Team. Lynne) and I included more explicit direction on where to gain more information in the following two sessions. Session two participants noted that starting with introductions led to a more cohesive group (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Anne), so I started session three with a round of names, pronouns, and where each person had traveled from. Similarly, an excellent suggestion in session two to leave space for more observation of the park itself (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Mike) led to an invitation in session three to look around Socrates and reflect on why people might spend time there. After a session two participant recommended a longer group sharing about who everyone chose for their planting buddy, for "getting at those personal connections" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Eloise), I invited participants in session three to share their envelopes in the final reflection session. All these suggestions deepened the experience of the participants in session three, and I was grateful for the chance to implement them.

Dialogue after the first two sessions also led to the largest change from my original lesson plans: incorporating an actual volunteer steward to be the person we met at the end of the experience. This was inspired both by our fantastic volunteer who stepped in as 'Mary' in session one, and by feedback in session two, when one participant offered "Do you think that this is something that like, Super Stewards could play a role in, be like part of the theater?" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Sarah). After seeing how well it worked in session one as an unplanned improvisation, I decided to attempt the change intentionally for the third session.

In practice, there were pros and cons to adopting a real-life steward. Using someone who wasn't a trained facilitator meant that I took on more facilitation myself, especially around the art activity. It was clear that our volunteer, Nicola, was less comfortable at the start of the interaction with participants than my co-facilitator Marcela had been, and it took us longer to get into the flow of conversation as a result. Using a real person also created less clarity about what was fictional and what was real. In my attempt to have the process be as easy for her as possible, I asked Nicola to be herself within a fictional framing (she had not, of course, lost a bag). On the other hand, Nicola was able to provide the group with far more detailed information about the process of becoming a steward, talking us through each volunteer option and each step. She had real life experience of stewardship that she could share with us, and her enthusiasm shone through in our conversation. Her ability to share knowledge about the plants in Socrates was clearly compelling, and speaking to her afterwards, the experience also gave her confidence in her own abilities. Overall, I believe this approach was more effective than using a co-facilitator. In future, I would just be more specific about my directions to any volunteer so that I could ensure we met them at the proper point in the search!

One of the most important aspects of meeting our 'steward' was seeing them as someone relatable. I had received feedback in the second session that it felt important for 'Mary' to be a real person, rather than a walking advertisement for stewardship. One scientist explained:

> I did like Mary's answer of, sort of, like, I'm not an expert, either. I found that very relatable, like you didn't give a textbook 'You know, you could be a super steward' you were like, 'you could go to the parks website and look up events.' And that's like, what a regular person would say. (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Sarah)

I didn't want to lose the advantage of having someone relatable as our steward. To achieve this, I made sure my steward volunteer knew that I didn't expect her to be an expert and encouraged her to be herself. From my perspective, this was highly successful. The participants were actively engaged in what Nicola shared, with many asking questions and taking notes on their phones. Nicola herself felt comfortable enough to admit the limits of her own knowledge and send people to the website to find out more. It felt like an important way to connect to the potential for stewardship in the lives of participants, bridging the dramatic activity and the real world. In the words of one participant, "I think the moments where we actually broke out and asked people questions, like in the café… or when we met Nicola here… when it sort of exits our bubble that we've created and enters the world around it's really powerful, those are important moments" (Participant. Student Group. Jess).

If these moments were powerful because they exited the "bubble" of the drama, how was the drama and roleplay *itself* powerful or important? In what ways was it an effective tool for environmental education (EE)? To answer these questions, I looked at how participants described the experience during the reflection period at the end of each implementation.

The Power of Roleplay and Dramatic Activity[11]

In my initial project question, I asked, "How can roleplay activate communities towards participating in local stewardship activities in natural areas?" Over the course of the project, I found that the depth of roleplay varied from session to session. While the scientists in session one and stewardship team in session two were asked to step into role as members of the public – and did so – the students in session three participated mostly as themselves. The students' experience is closer to what I envisioned in designing the project for use with the public. In my mind, while the role play didn't ask them to take on a character per say, the session *did* put them into an investigative or detective-like role outside of themselves. They became detectives solving a mystery, effectively donning Heathcote's 'Mantle of the Expert.' Indeed, some participants noted that they were behaving in ways that they wouldn't normally, especially around a heightened level of engagement and interest in returning a stranger's bag.

On the other hand, some participants in session three did not consider the experience to involve roleplay. Asked what they had enjoyed about the session, one remarked, "we don't have to take on a role, we just participate as ourselves, so that's when it's like, okay, I can do this… and do it outside a performative aspect. Like, be that person who might, like, inquire." (Participant. Student Group. Eric).[12] Another participant agreed. "Yeah, I've tried to play like Dungeons and Dragons before. And I'm also like a shy person, so that was like,

[11] Bolton describes dramatic activity as comprising exercises, dramatic playing and theater (2).

[12] All quotes in this section come from the reflection period that took place at the end of each session, concurrent with the artmaking.

so hard for me. And I was a little like, uncomfortable when we started and then I was like, okay, it's not that serious" (Participant. Student Group. Lily). In these cases, the lack of what they would define as roleplay – taking on a character outside of themselves – made it easier for them to engage and made the project successful. Given our differing definitions of roleplay, I have moved away from that term in this project. Instead, I will use 'dramatic activity' in place of 'roleplay,' and use Anthony Jackson's concept of "theatrical frames" to analyze these sessions and the dramatic engagement.

Jackson offers this framework[13] as a way to analyze participatory theater in general, and Theater-in-Education in particular. In his words, the theatrical frame:

> Consist[s] of the boundary line, visible or invisible, that theater artists deliberately draw around the experience that they wish to highlight or examine. The boundary line enables the artist (writer, director, and/or performer) to craft the action within it in ways that intensify and give particular significance to aspects of human experience. (161-2)

He goes on to describe multiple frames on a single event, and I will draw from these frames in this analysis.

The Pre-Theater Frame: Background and Introduction

Each of the groups came into the drama from a different position and background. For each, I introduced my project and offered a brief explanation of

[13] Originally developed by Erving Goffman in his *Frame analysis: an essay on the organization of experience*.

applied theater, but the other preparations varied. For session one, the stewards knew very little about what they were about to experience. As their manager told them “I don’t know how to explain it but you're gonna like it and just enjoy it” (Participant. Stewardship Team. Allie). We had limited time, so I stuck to the basic introduction. The session came in the middle of their workday and was intended as an enjoyable break and an opportunity to experience a different approach to volunteer engagement, and as a result, I observed that some participants seemed more immediately engaged than others. Coming to this session was a requirement for them, and they chose their own level of participation. This wasn’t a negative aspect of the experience, however. As their manager remarked afterwards, “you could participate in different levels, like sort of more active or more observant. And so, it leaves a welcoming space, no matter how much you're coming into it knowing or not knowing” (Participant. Stewardship Team. Allie).

In addition, as their manager walked me out, she thanked me again for doing the session with them. Her main goal had been for the team to have some fun and see how the material could be engaging, and the session had been perfect for what she wanted them to experience. She explained that they were just talking about how to engage young people with stewardship, and that this was a perfect example of how to incorporate play. Allie was also pleased that our volunteer ‘Mary’ got a moment to shine – she noted that she had been doing great work on the team, and it was really nice to see her step into the spotlight (Participant. Stewardship Team).

In session two, everyone who attended the salon was there by choice. They had all been invited via email, read the description of the session, and elected to participate. Unlike the first group, they weren't all colleagues, so we started the session with a more in-depth introductory round to help build group cohesion before diving into the drama. While many of them did already know each other, it was clear that the sharing also helped them operate collaboratively and have fun together. One participant noted this, offering,

> I liked that we went around and did introductions… and we also already know each other and generally have a sense of like, who knows this place and who doesn't. Is there a way to do that at the beginning? So like, 'who knows a lot about Socrates' or 'how many times have you come here' … so that those people might become the leaders of the group, like you're guiding them, but they might be called the connectors? (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Anne)

This dynamic was reflected in the second session, where certain members offered to lead us to places around the park. Not only was this a useful reflection for further implementations, but it points to how the culture built before the session can impact the session itself. When I incorporated introductions – name, pronouns, and where they traveled from that morning – into the third session, I learned that only one of the group had traveled from nearby. This provided useful information for me and helped us all position ourselves in relationship to the park. This group also all knew each other, since they were in the same class together, so I didn't feel the need to delve deeper.

The Outer Theatrical Frame: The 'Gangbuster'

Next, we entered the theatrical frames, introducing roleplay and aesthetic distance. These frames were introduced through the 'Gangbuster,' the bag that I 'found' in the park, and my request that they help me find its owner. As I presented the bag, I could feel my aspect shift. I was moving from formal presenter and facilitator to fellow-questioner, shifting expertise from myself on to the participants as I asked them for help in solving the mystery. I felt myself widen my eyes, leaning in towards them and heightening my physicality as if to say, "now we're in a drama!" As Jackson describes, this marks "[t]he transitional phase…They begin to enter into the theatrical contract. A state of expectation predominates" (165). I could feel the attention shift to the bag, and each time as I asked, "should we look inside?" the answer came back quickly – yes, we should!

The Involvement Frame: Finding our Steward

In this frame, the dramatic activity shifted how participants were engaging with the world around them. They were now, in Jackson's words, "interacting and influencing the flow of events" (166) and driving how we discovered the underlying narrative. One key factor was that I deliberately passed the 'Mantle of the Expert' to them, in which "power and responsibility move from organizer to group" (Neelands and Goode 45).

As we discovered each item in the bag, I encouraged the group to reach their own conclusions. The fact that we were able to move from site to site, with the clues solved at each location, confirmed for both me and for them that they could solve the mystery. They were experts. In fact, they could even make

suggestions I hadn't anticipated. For instance, when – in both sessions one and two – participants suggested looking up the IP address on the printout of the seed saving workshop, or when one offered that we contact the leader of the workshop to find Mary, I was impressed by their creativity. I expressed gratitude for the suggestions – and gently discouraged following what I knew was a dead end. In these instances, it was clear to me that I was not only in dialogue with my scientist colleagues, which I had expected, but I was also in dialogue with the participants. I was learning about their views on the world and what they read (or didn't read) into situations, both through their interpretations of the 'facts' that I left in the scavenger hunt, and through the questions and meanings they drew from the experience.

There were many instances of participants taking on the 'Mantle'. In every session a participant led the group to new stops. As we discovered the inciting item, I would always ask "does anyone know where [the Free store, for instance] is?" Invariably, someone would know, and when asked "will you lead us there?" they did. This very effectively took power out of my hands and placed them into a position of leadership in the group. They also took the lead in other ways, acting as one of Vygotsky's "knowledgeable others." Throughout the sessions not only did participants share knowledge and insight to solve the mystery, but they also offered scientific and botanical information. For instance, in session three multiple people joined the conversation to share what they knew about the plants surrounding us, while others shared insights about the built environment, or, in

one instance, a queer birding group. Their confidence in sharing these facts led me to believe that they had successfully taken on the ‘Mantle’.

Another striking aspect of this frame was the level of sheer enjoyment. As multiple participants reported, “it was fun.” I saw a lot of laughter and enjoyment as the sessions developed, including delight at discovering new clues, and marked enthusiasm with each new location. Perhaps part of it was that, as adults, we don’t get to play very often. There were multiple comments on how childlike or playful the experience felt, with one participant offering “what’s unique is like having the experience as an adult. Yeah, you know, a childlike experience as an adult” (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Sarah). Another remarked,

> It felt useful, like scavenger hunts are something that I think of as like, being done by kids. And it's not something you really do as an adult unless you do that game room stuff. And then ending with decorating cards and notes with like crayons and markers that just feels like ultimate kid-dom. And like how we embraced the activity - I don't know it just felt really alive. Like it wasn't like a desk bound activity, like, being out doing things. Yeah. I love that. (Participant. Stewardship Team. Lynne)

The dramatic activity in this frame also changed their perspective as they engaged in the sessions. One participant in session three remarked that the drama “heightens your awareness. Then the information that you’re taking in, like, is, for me at least, retained more because you’re like, your senses are kind of heightened and you’re paying attention.” (Participant. Student Group. Eric)

Comments included “it definitely puts you into an observing kind of mode, which is cool, because you’re looking for clues” (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Morgan) and “I liked being observant” (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Patrick). Others described the experience as surprising, saying they enjoyed that “I didn’t know where it was going at any point” (Participant. Stewardship Team. Eliza). All these comments point to heightened engagement and imagination within the drama. This increased level of engagement wasn’t lost on participants, either. “It’s just interesting, the intersection between education and how much more inspiring and interesting this is, done this way,” Jess remarked (Participant. Student Group).

Improvisation within the Involvement Frame

Allowing the drama to be guided by the participants inevitably meant accepting a level of improvisation in the work. I hadn’t anticipated this in my initial session design, and as I adjusted for sessions two and three. I found that my designs became much looser to allow for more participant input. Often, I couldn’t anticipate exactly what would interest participants, and thus the shape of the dialogue. For instance, in session one I included a plant that ‘Mary’ bought for her niece. We discovered the plant in its labeled paper bag – and promptly forgot about it. Yet, the group was very interested in facts that pointed to Mary being vegetarian. This may have been linked to the personal experiences of the group – based on their knowledge of the café, I believe many were either vegetarian or vegan – or perhaps not. Either way, it was not what I had anticipated.

Another instance of improvisation came in response to the weather. In session two, it was so cold that I had the entire group enter the café to get drinks and take a break. This meant that they witnessed my – unplanned – conversation with the staff. In that moment I was worried that I had broken the dramatic frame, as the baristas both denied having a regular customer named Mary and insisted that they knew who the coffee belonged to. I had to convince them that no, I would hold on to the coffee, and that no, I didn't think it belonged to their regular with the Shih Tzu. Luckily the participants read this exchange as entirely within the drama, and just took away the message that Mary wasn't a regular.

In general, the level of improvisation felt fruitful and generative. It also led to my favorite moment in all the sessions, when the participants insisted on singing Happy Birthday to Mary in session two. The moment resonated with participants as well. "I would definitely keep the singing aspect, it's a group moment, it's really cool," Sarah said (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon).

The only improvisation I had mixed feelings about was cutting the visits to Hallet's Cove and the Free Store in the third session. Cutting Hallet's Cove was both in response to the participant not seeing the clue in the book and to time pressure to meet Nicola. The Free Store got cut due simply to where Nicola was sitting, only feet away from the Free Store itself. While neither of these changes impacted the level of engagement with stewardship, both last-minute decisions eliminated opportunities to see more examples of stewardship.

The Investigative Frame: Hot-seating our Steward

Staying within the drama, we then entered an investigative frame when we turned to our steward.[14] Jackson describes this as when "as themselves or in role… [the participants have] a task to report on or to investigate events/characters" (166). The participants were now investigators, in charge of discovering more about, and from, Mary. Throughout the drama I had primed them for this moment, suggesting at certain points that "perhaps we can ask Mary about it when we find her." When I did jump in to ask Mary questions, these were all from what the participants had expressed interest in during the drama. Overall, I took a back seat, and as with 'Mantle of the Expert', 'Hot-seating' put the participants in the lead, taking us from topic to topic.

There were two aspects to this hot-seating that felt particularly meaningful. The first was that the steward became a real person, with a friend who had sent them a postcard, a birthday, and real interests and concerns in the world. They became – quite literally, especially after we met them – a real person. In session two, one participant noted that:

> I also liked the way that when you were sharing out what you were doing, it wasn't like a public service message on getting involved in street tree care. You know, you did this weird wacky thing of like, singing trees which makes it very, like, personal but yet also like, we're all wacky we all do wacky things and think sideways… it's like I care for the tree and I sing to it. (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Eloise)

[14] For simplicity's sake I will refer to our steward exclusively as 'Mary' in this section, even though we used both the names Mary and Nicola.

This distinction between public service messaging and relatable human being feels key to allowing people to engage with stewardship. It's also backed up by scientific studies. As the same participant noted, "there's science that shows that … asking a potential new friend is actually going to be more valuable. You can act on "Mary's" information better than hearing it from [somewhere official]" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Eloise).

The hot-seating also allowed participants to ask about the information that interested them the most. In sessions one and two, the stewardship team and the salon guests were most interested in learning more about Mary herself. This made sense, as they were also less likely to need, or want, scientific information. On the other hand, in session three with the students, we had lots of questions about the ins and outs of stewardship. While Mary started out giving a general overview of various stewardship opportunities, questions from participants quickly focused in on street tree care. I heard expressions of "oh, I want to do that!" It felt very gratifying to let them follow their own interest. As I hoped, this section allowed participants to make connections about who engages in stewardship and why, then extrapolate it to how they might engage in stewardship in their own lives.

The Investigative Frame Part Two: Artmaking and Reflection

For the final part of the sessions, we exited our drama and entered another investigative frame, this time examining the drama itself, all while participating in an arts-based activity. This secondary investigative frame offered participants the opportunity to reflect on and make meaning from the drama, synthesizing through an embodied arts activity. I was pleased to note that many of these reflections

related to care. As one scientist remarked, “we’re not just observing the bag, but we’re observing the care that’s happening [at the site]” (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Sarah). Another connected caring for the person with caring for the site, remarking,

> The thing that's cool about the bag is that I think New Yorkers are often like, well, somebody left it, I'll just leave it here. Like, what the effort of this experience is us coming together being like, no, it's our job to try to return this bag. So like, it's also our job to try to take care of the spaces near us. So yeah, let’s not just leave it to the parks department. (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Anne)

The care wasn’t just about the natural environment. Another scientist remarked that she was used to paying attention to the environment; this activity felt like it was about noticing the human world. She said,

> I feel like when you're walking around in New York City, if I'm in Times Square or if I’m somewhere else, I just ignore a lot of things. It’s just like so difficult to just take everything in. And so like the fact that we found a bag and that we need to return it someone was like, we cared about that person, like the experience of leaving something, and then we like found the clues and observed certain things within that, and I thought that was just a very different way then how I usually try to keep sane and keep focused it was just like, oh, I can open up and be concerned about this and like help someone receive their bag again. (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Rachel)

Not only did this comment reference my goal of incorporating human to human relationships of care in the drama, but I was particularly struck by her acknowledgement that this was different for her as an ecologist. It felt deeply relevant to our dialogue and affirming that we had co-created something that could be experienced by, and be meaningful to, people from different backgrounds.

Others spoke about the place-based nature of the experience, sharing that "there is a narrative of discovery… accumulated into a kind of lived experience of finding this person, but also the experience of being at this site. So I like that very much" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Morgan) and that "all these worlds that are right here, it's like you're in one spot, and then you're like, I'm in the cove. Oh my God, I'm in the café, and it's like, all within one block. That blew me away" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Eloise). These comments felt like evidence of "creative gaps" (Jackson 179 – 81) allowing participants the opportunity to expand into a wider and deeper understanding of the world around them.

Artmaking and Synthesis

Concurrent to, and existing with, the final investigative frame, the arts-based activity offered an opportunity for praxis, reflecting on what we learned from Mary while creating an envelope of seeds to share with people in their real lives. The reflections from this section were powerful. For one scientist,

> I feel like this, what's in [the envelopes]...it's the culmination of why we do this work. You know, so in that way, it was like a very profound

> moment…And it was when you said, will you be my planting buddy, you know, and put it out there to me, then that was like, passing it to us. And then whatever is in here is really why we do the work, in my sense, in my meaning like, oh, this could really encapsulate quite a lot. (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Eloise)

In line with the statement above, I was struck in each session by the intensity participants brought to making their envelopes. Even those who hadn't seemed particularly involved during the drama appeared deeply invested in the art activity. I observed one participant who had seemed nonchalant for most of session two drawing intricate vines on his envelope, while others took care to cover the whole surface with bright colors.[15]

Each group also took care to check with me about how to plant the seeds they received. Some wanted to plant them inside, and others were going to find a neighborhood tree bed to beautify. Although not everyone shared their planting buddy – and I ran out of time to ask in sessions one and two – I did get some answers. Many planned to share their seeds with their family, children, or significant others. Others chose someone significant who would particularly enjoy the process of planting, like a best friend or a neighbor. Each participant was very clear on who they had chosen, and when, in session three, we had extra time for the art activity many people decorated envelopes for multiple people in their lives.

In Dialogue with Scientists About the Session

[15] See Appendix 4 for pictures of some of the envelopes from session three.

My final reflection with the scientists from my residency took place after my second session, evaluating across two criteria. The first was what worked, and what didn't. They all agreed that doing a session later in the year, when the weather was warmer, would be beneficial. Alternatively, moving more quickly between sites would have kept us warmer. The second criterion was what resonated with them, and what they would take away. Allie, the manager of the stewardship team, reflected that the event resonated with her team because it worked for all levels of age and experience. She had enjoyed it enough to talk to her partner about it at home that evening (Participant. Stewardship Team). Sarah noted that she enjoyed how we, as a group, became a spectacle (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon). They all appreciated the framing of Mary as a beginner steward, which made the content accessible, and felt that the final exercise really brought it home and offered a moment of personal synthesis. To further deepen the artmaking experience, Eloise (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon) suggested inviting participants to read out their letters after they were written, which I thought was a lovely offer.

They also had some questions about what else the sessions could contain. Allie expressed interest in trying it out with teens, while Sarah wondered how the landscape itself could become a part of the story. Perhaps the landscape could even be a clue, Eloise suggested, while Rachel (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon) posited that there could be a clue about the landscape in the bag. Sarah suggested creating a clearer connection between the place, the person, and the objects, rather than having the objects be the focus of the scavenger hunt, which I

agreed with. Tim (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon) suggested more stewardship payoff, or even meeting multiple people at the end, while noting that it was cool and engaging as a method, and something that could really get people talking and exploring together. Overall, they expressed satisfaction with the project and an interest in future iterations.

Assessing Goals and Making Discoveries

My research goals were to examine how I can be in dialogue in the creation period of the project; to assess how effectively I could adjust my project in line with feedback from my scientist team; and to explore how to make space for dialogue in every stage of designing a project. In the creation period, I tried a more open approach than I normally would. Instead of feeling like I needed to have all the answers, I allowed the inputs and interests of my collaborators to shift my project vison. Given that I moved from a digital project based on queer identity to an in-person project based on stewardship, this clearly had an impact. I also let myself percolate before deciding what to do. The extra time allowed me to incorporate the ideas and opinions from the scientists, and to listen for what form the final project wanted to take.

Once I had an initial project, I also succeeded in altering it based on feedback. I made significant changes to sessions one and two based on what I learned from scientists and park staff, which made the subsequent sessions stronger. When I reflect on how to make space for dialogue at every stage of a project, I only wish that I had discussed the session plan with scientists before the first implementation. If I had taken the time to gather feedback before the first

session, I may have been able to make the first session stronger. As it is, I do feel dialogue was interwoven throughout the project design. I learned the value of slowness, frequent conversations, and feedback sessions when working in dialogue.

For my project goals, I wanted to examine how role play can be used to create an adaptable theater piece for implementation in parks around New York City; to assess the efficacy of roleplay as a tool in EE, and to explore how the conventions and tools of drama could help activate communities. Through the process of implementation and reflection, I learned that roleplay exists on more of a spectrum than I realized. When thinking about roleplay, it is essential to think about the degree of fiction to which one is asking participants to commit. While it might not always appear in a guise that participants recognize (i.e. adopting a full character), roleplay is nonetheless a useful tool for applied theater projects used to support and further EE.

There were several particularly applicable conventions and tools. The 'Mantle of the Expert' energized participants to discover facts and share knowledge with one another, while aesthetic distance allowed them to engage in praxis, and to play along without being too self-conscious. They filled the creative gaps in the piece effortlessly, creating new meanings for themselves and others. Our 'Gangbuster' was a fun and energetic introduction to the drama, and 'Role-in-a-Bag' was especially useful in an outdoor environment where you can't control the surroundings like you can in a classroom. The artmaking effectively offered a chance for personal reflection and synthesis. I also succeeded in creating

a structure that not only worked in multiple locations but could be modified in the same location. Finally, the sense of play and fun that the overall concept engendered was highly useful. All these findings validated my instincts about how applied theater could make environmental education more engaging, and I hope to continue applying these tools in the future.

Where to From Here?

While it wasn't possible to incorporate all the scientists' suggestions in session three, they did give me rich material for future iterations. Other aspects to investigate for the future include information about urban environmental issues that people experience every day; content on links between personal health and environmental health, i.e. public housing; bringing awareness to resources about sewer overflow and water quality at Hallet's Cove; and creating connections between the outdoor experience people have in these sessions with experiences in other natural areas. There were also creative suggestions to consider, like geocaching material in tree beds or writing an envelope to a particular tree instead of a planting buddy, where "you could have them name the tree and then go plant it in there, or you could do the same kind of thing but where you're incorporating tree identification" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Anne).

Another suggestion was that sessions could be modified for stewardship volunteers to deliver without the aid of an applied theater practitioner. Options included describing "three or four stops and the kinds of features that you would need to have, then people could customize it to their place" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Sarah). Perhaps it could take the form of a kit, to use as "a

play-based way to, like, engage your neighbors" (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon. Anne); or a version could take participants to three or four stops with cool tree guards or interesting things happening in tree beds; or be a scavenger hunt that ends at a super steward event, so that the participants could join in the stewardship after meeting 'Mary' and returning the bag. Although beyond my personal capacity to implement, there was even the suggestion of having a version of 'Mary' on the Parks website and a Mary avatar that could be connected to multiple events or sessions to create a through line of stewardship.

These are all fascinating lines of inquiry and possibilities to engage in future dialogue with scientists, land managers, and volunteer stewards. I also have further questions about how they could work. My ongoing hope for this project is to find a way to have it serve the interests and needs of the stewardship team, complementing the work they already do and helping them recruit more volunteers from the community. At this point it seems most likely that it will develop into some kind of kit that a member of the stewardship team can implement with a volunteer in different areas of New York City. While it might be developed for an all-ages group, it seems just as likely that it will stay an experience designed for adults.

Whatever the next version, I feel confident it will involve dialogue between myself and the stewardship team, based on the foundation of this project. It will build on my reflections and insights and continue to incorporate suggestions from scientists and park staff. Specifically, I will continue to explore how applied theater can be used to enhance environmental education and increase

community interest in stewardship. As Eloise shared, “we need to do more of it, you know, instead of like, I’m from government and here’s my tree plan” (Participant. Artists and Scientists Salon). I certainly agree.

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[16] Redacted to protect partner anonymity.

[17] Redacted to protect partner anonymity.

Appendix 1: Script for Session One

Approximate time: 50 minutes

Meet Group

A: Hi everyone! Thanks so much for coming. I could really use your help – I found this bag in the park, and I don't have any idea who it belongs to or how to get it back to them. There's no wallet or any ID, but I was wondering if maybe together we could find some clues.

Shows bag

Here's the bag. Anything anyone notice about it that might help us?

The bag is a reuseable shopping basket from Trade Fair, which has locations around Astoria. Maybe that's where this person lives?

Okay great. I'm going to look inside to see if there's anything that might give us a clue....

Pulls out cultivator with name on it, passes it around

Does anyone know what this is? How would you use it? What do you think that might tell us about this person who left the bag?

The cultivator has the name on it (Mary) – it is used for gardening. It also has dirt on it so it's been used, but it is not very old so this person has maybe recently gotten into gardening. The cultivator specifically is often used to loosen soil for planting.

Okay, we have a name. That's great! Let's see what else is in the bag.

Pulls out paper bag with plant and coaster the BCG cafe inside. The note on the bag says 'For Sal, love, Aunt Mary'

Okay, here's a paper bag. What can we find out from this?

The bag has the name Mary again, and it mentions that she is an aunt. It also has a coaster from a cafe. Does anyone know the cafe?

What have we learned about the person who owns this bag? Shall we go over to the cafe?

→ Travel to the cafe. Go 'talk' to the server. Bring back menus for participants.

Well, they don't seem to be here, so let's look in the bag again.

Pulls out book with check for 'music lessons' and text about a seed saving workshop.

What do we notice? What is/are these items?

This is a book about Central Park. The check is marking a section about Harlem Meer. And there is an old print out about a seed saving workshop.

What do we think we've learned? Where do you think we should go next? Does anyone know where Harlem Meer is?

→ Have a group member take us to Harlem Meer

Why would someone come here? What are we noticing?

I don't see anyone looking for a bag, so let's see what else is in here.

Pull out postcard that talks about the statue of the three dancing girls.

What do we notice? Where do we think we should go next?

The postcard is from a vegetarian restaurant. Clearly Mary has a good friend who likes going there. She also talks about a statue of dancing girls.

Should we go to the statue?

→ Travel to the statue and meet Mary!

Appendix 2: Script for Session Two

Approximate time: 1.5 hours

Group gathers

A: Hi everyone! Thanks so much for coming. I could really use your help – I found this bag in the Park, and I don't have any idea who it belongs to or how to get it back to them. There's no wallet or any ID, but I was wondering if maybe together we could find some clues.

Shows bag

Here's the bag. Anything anyone notice about it that might help us?

The bag is a reuseable shopping basket from Trade Fair, which has locations around Queens (including on Broadway)

Okay great. I'm going to look inside to see if there's anything that might give us a clue....

Pulls out cultivator with name on it, passes it around

Does anyone know what this is? How would you use it? What do you think that might tell us about this person who left the bag?

The cultivator has the name on it (Mary) – it is used for gardening. It also has dirt on it so it's been used, but it is not very old so this person has maybe recently gotten into gardening. The hand rake specifically is often used to loosen soil for planting.

Okay, we have a name. That's great! Let's see what else is in the bag.

Pulls out book about Socrates with postcard and check tucked into the back, passes it around

Okay, here's a book. What can we find out from this book?

The book is about Socrates – and the postcard marks a page about Hallet's Cove. There's also a check for $240 for Voice Classes. Now we really need to find this person!

Read out postcard. So this person has just had a birthday. What else do we notice about this postcard?

What have we learned about the person who owns this bag? What do you think we should do next? Maybe we could go over to Hallet's Cove in case they are there?

→ Travel to Hallet's Cove. Look around.

What do we see? Well, they don't seem to be here, so let's look in the bag again.

Pulls out pitch pipe. What do we notice?

This is a pitch pipe, used to set tones for singing. So she does sing!

Pull out coffee. What do we notice?

The bag of coffee is from Chateau le Woof. Maybe they know who owns the bag! Shall we go ask?

→ Travel over to Chateau Le Woof; A goes in 'to ask about the person who left the bag'

A: It sounds like Mary went in earlier today to get a coffee, but isn't there now.

Pull out Post-It with 'Books for the Free Store' on it.

What could this mean? Do we know where there is a free store?

→ Walk over to the Free Store

Let's look inside. Maybe there is a book about singing.

Find Shakespeare's song book.

Mary's name and phone number is inside. Shall we call her?

Mary is still here! She's just across the Park. Shall we go give her the bag?

→ Go over the sculpture and meet Mary

Appendix 3: Script for Session Three

Approximate time: 1.5 hours

Location 1: Center of the Park

A: Hi everyone! Thanks so much for coming. I could really use your help – I found this bag in the Park, and I don't have any idea who it belongs to or how to get it back to them. There's no wallet or any ID, but I was wondering if maybe together we could find some clues.

Item 1: grocery bag

Here's the bag. Anything anyone notice about it that might help us?

[The bag is a reuseable shopping basket from Trade Fair, which has locations around Queens (including on Broadway)]

Item 2: Cultivator with the name Nicola on it

Does anyone know what this is? How would you use it? What do you think that might tell us about this person who left the bag?

Item 3: Bag of Coffee from Chateau le Woof

Hmm, where do we think this came from? Does anyone know where Chateau le Woof is?

Location 2: Chateau le Woof

Well, the people inside have seen Nicola, but they said she left a little while ago. Let's see what else is in the bag!

Item 4: Book about Socrates sculpture park, marked at Hallet's Cove

Item 5: [Inside book] Postcard from Jessica about bird watching and identifying trees

Does anyone know where Hallett's Cove is? Great, let's go over there!

Location 3: Hallet's Cove

It doesn't look like Belinda is here. What do we notice about the cove? Why might people come here?

Item 5: Post It saying 'Books for the Free Store'

What is a free store? Have we seen one around here? Let's go look for it!

Location 4: The Free Store in Socrates Sculpture Park

Let's look inside. Maybe there is a book about [whatever is mentioned in the postcard]

Item 6: Book with Nicola's name and phone number inside

I'll give her a call! Maybe she's still around and we can give her the book back!!!

Location 5: Meet up (by picnic tables):

Conversation with Nicola!

Appendix 4: Photos

Photo 1: Envelopes decorated by participants in session three.

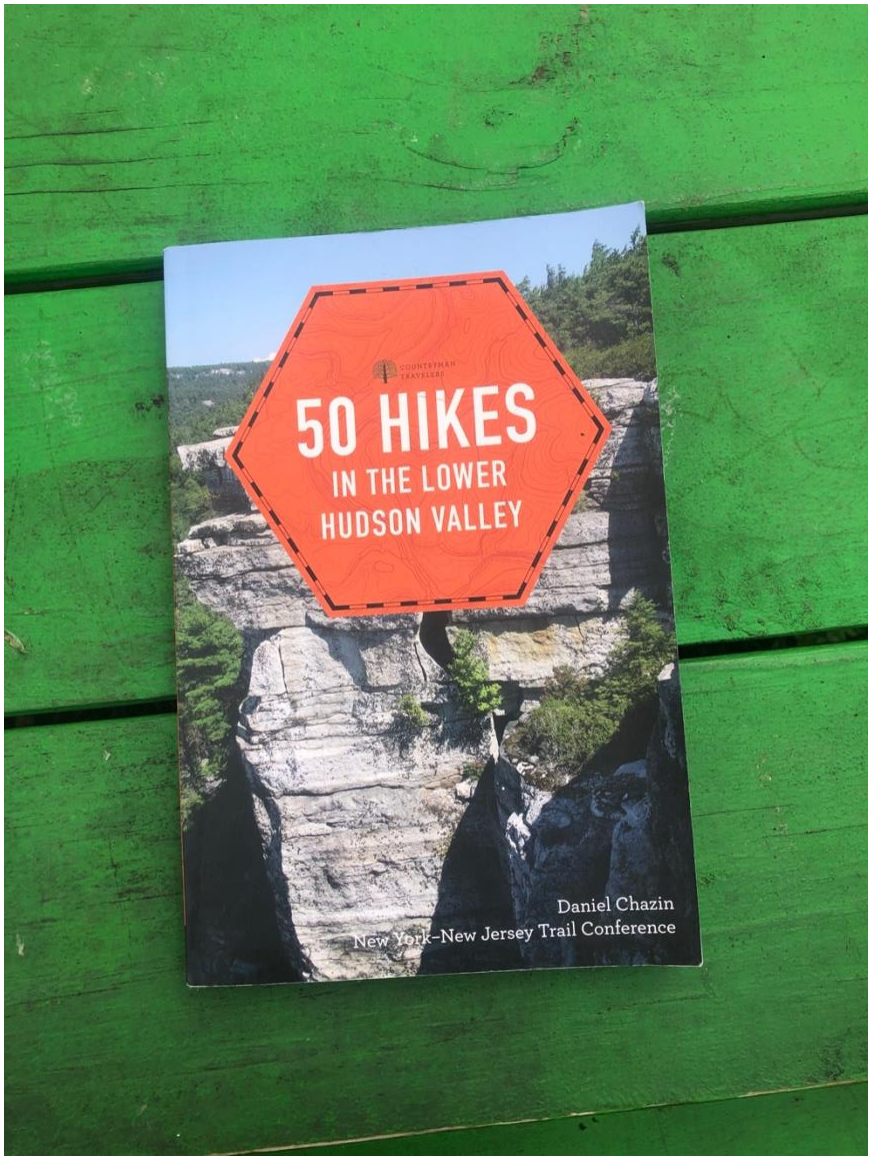


Photo 2: The final clue in the Free Store in session three.

Photo 3: Coffee from Chateau le Woof, used in sessions two and three.

Photo 4: Art supplies and an example envelope used in all three sessions.

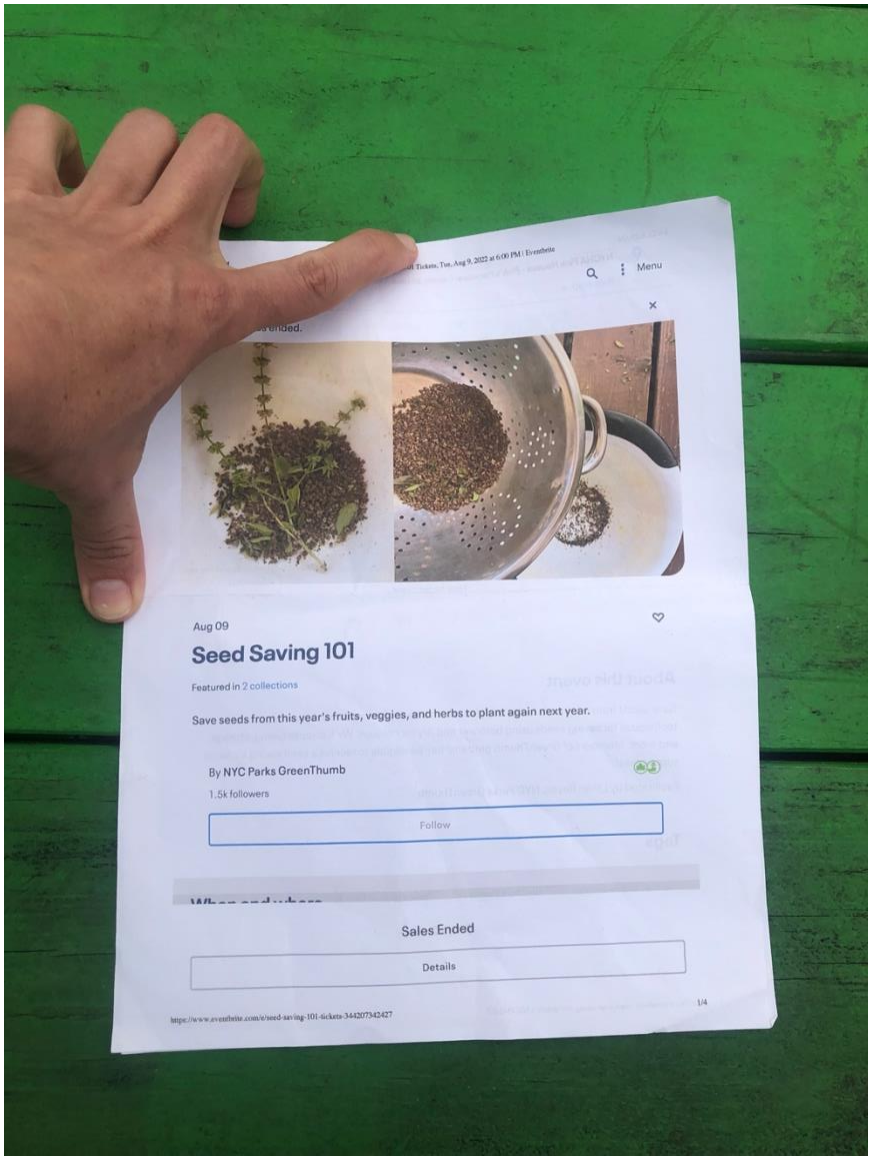


Photo 5: The printout of the seed-saving workshop registration used in all three sessions.

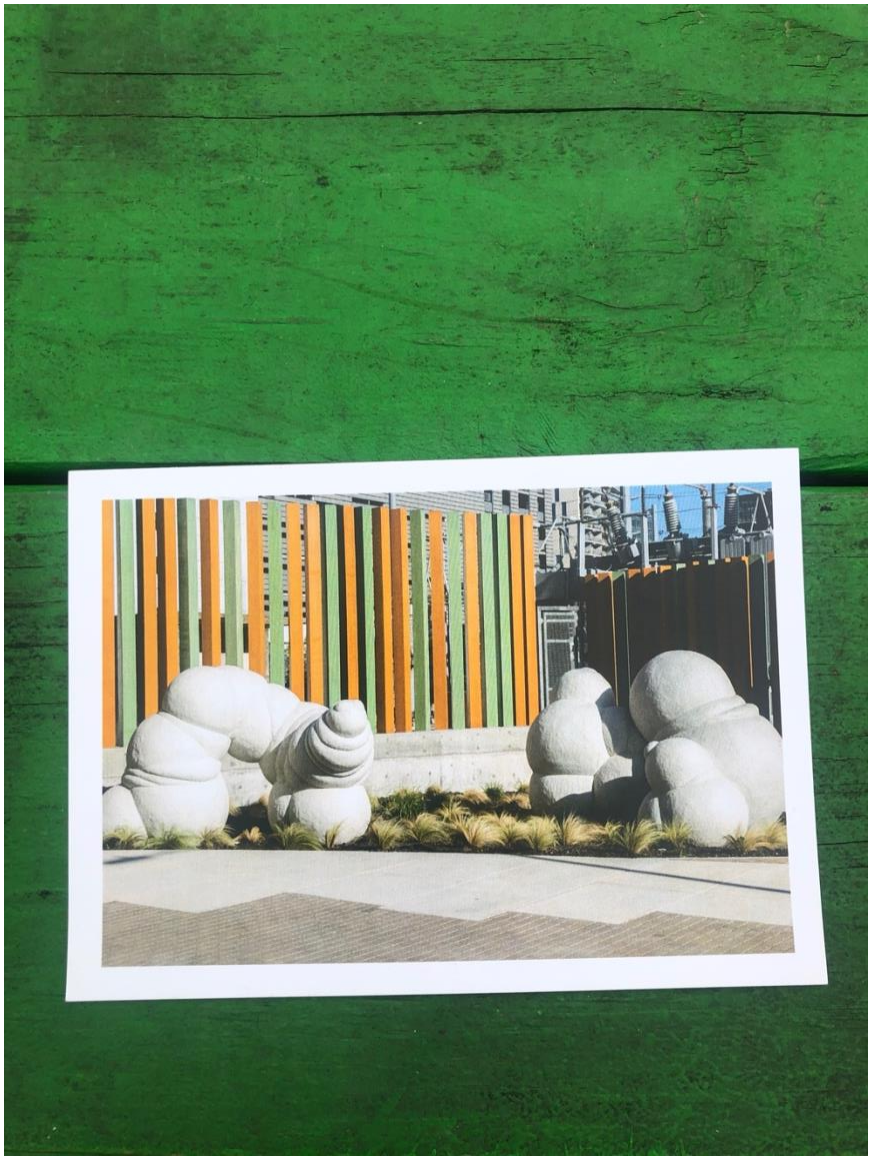


Photo 6: The postcard from session three.

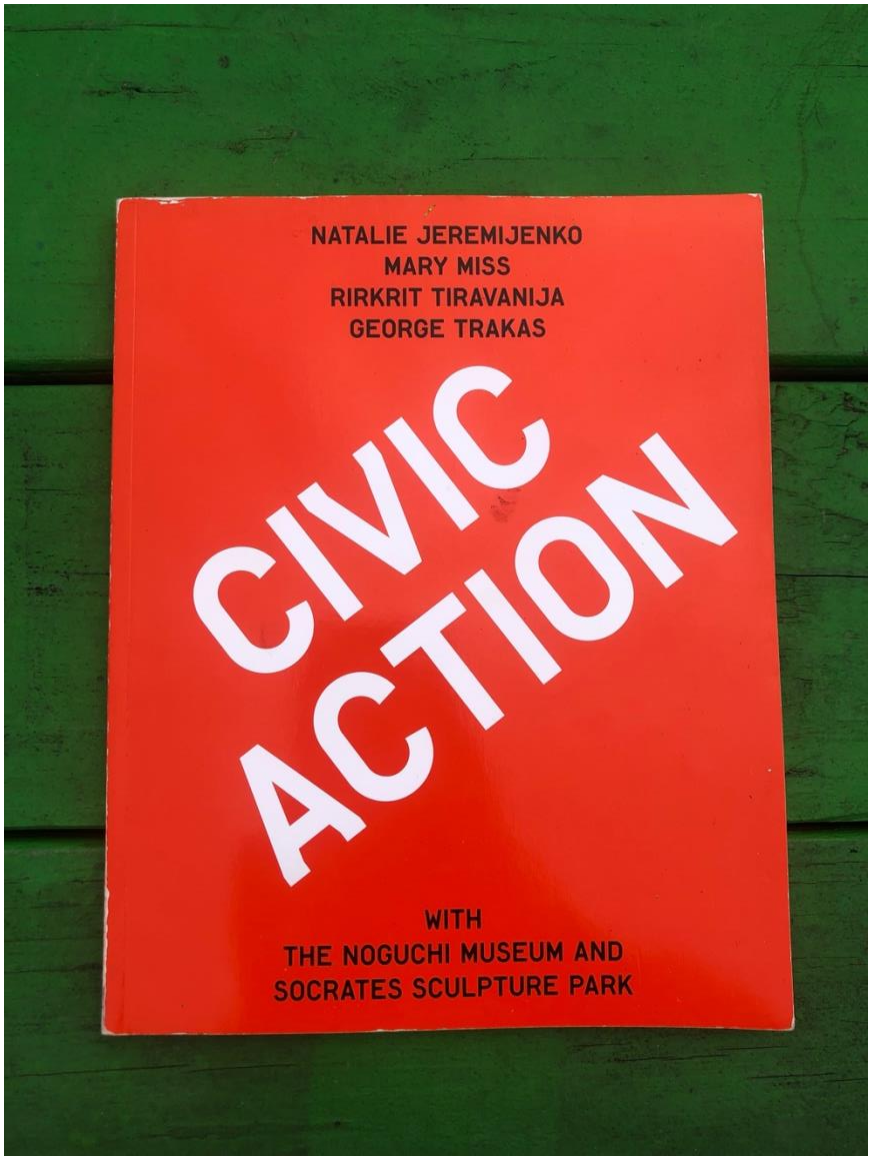


Photo 7: The book used in sessions two and three.

Photo 8: The section in the book about Hallet's Cove used in sessions two and three.

Photo 9: The cultivator used in all three sessions.

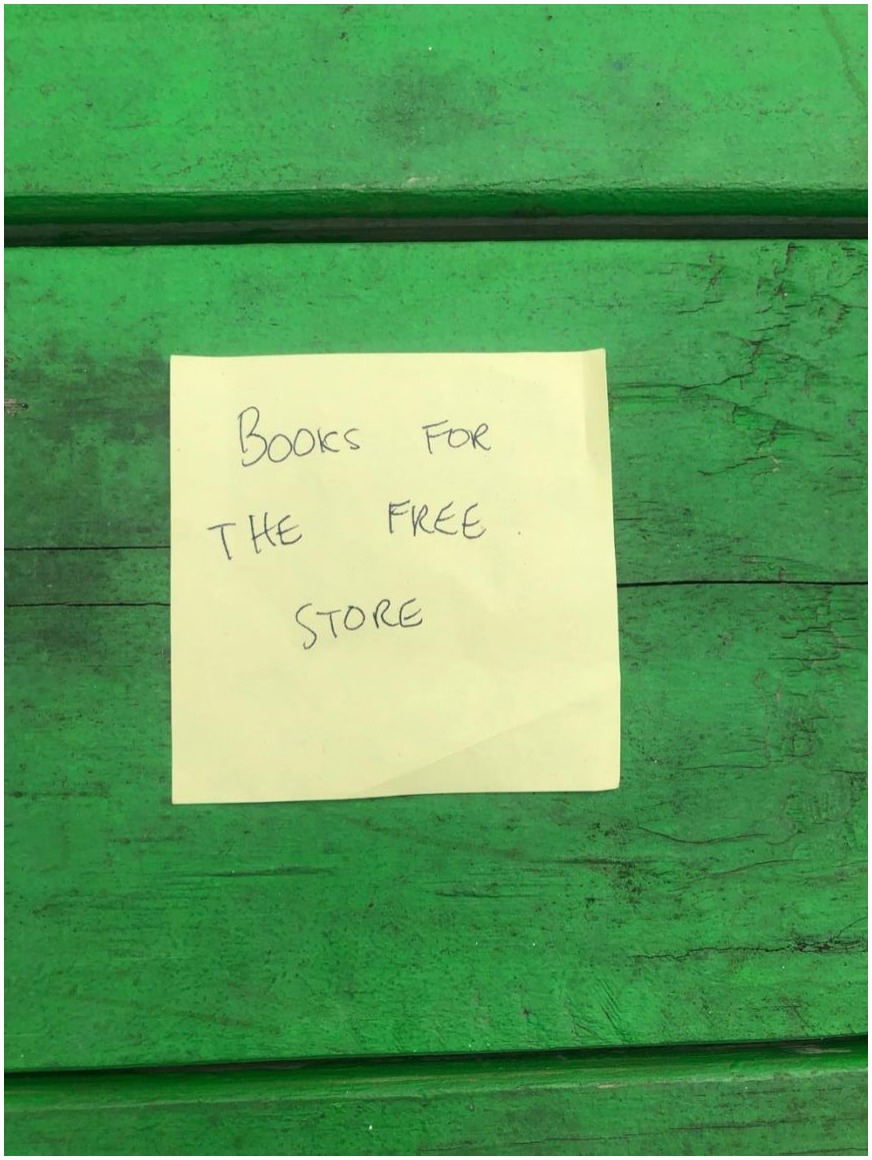


Photo 10: The post-it note used in sessions two and three.

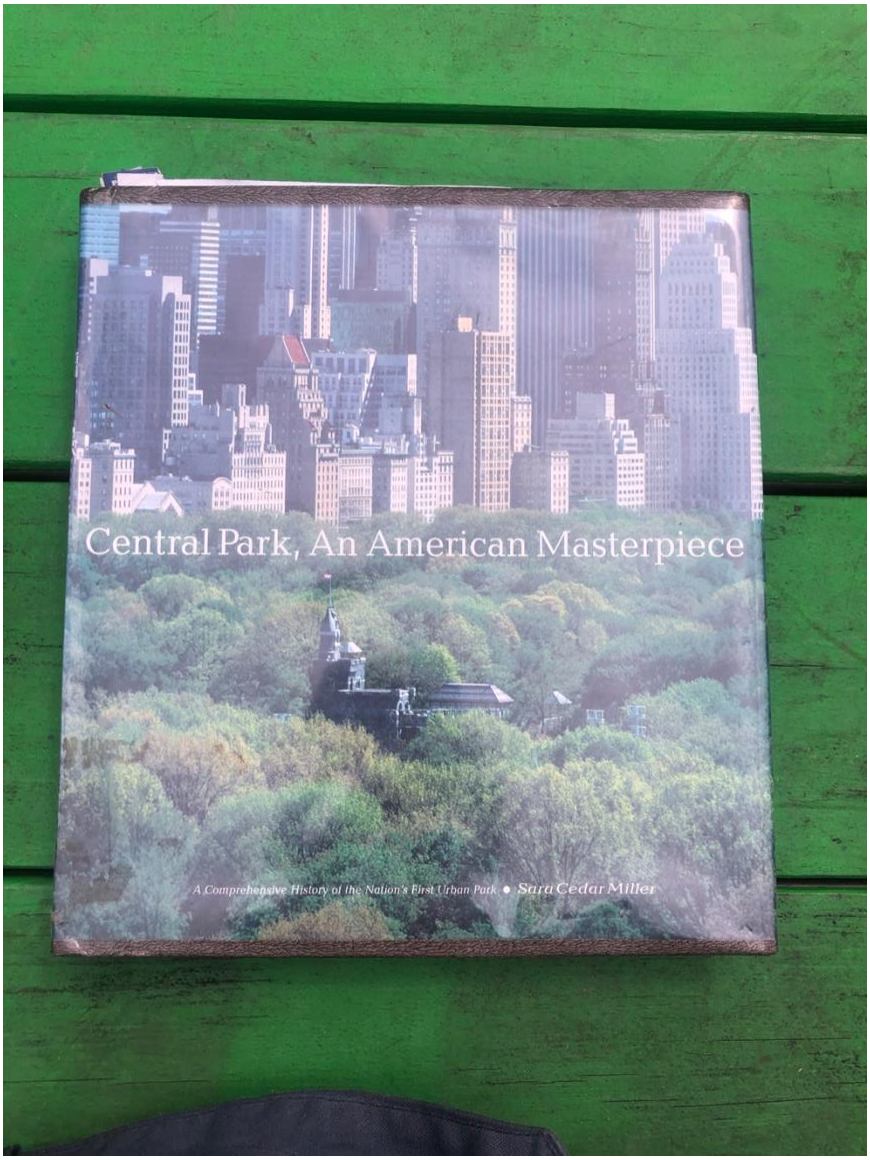
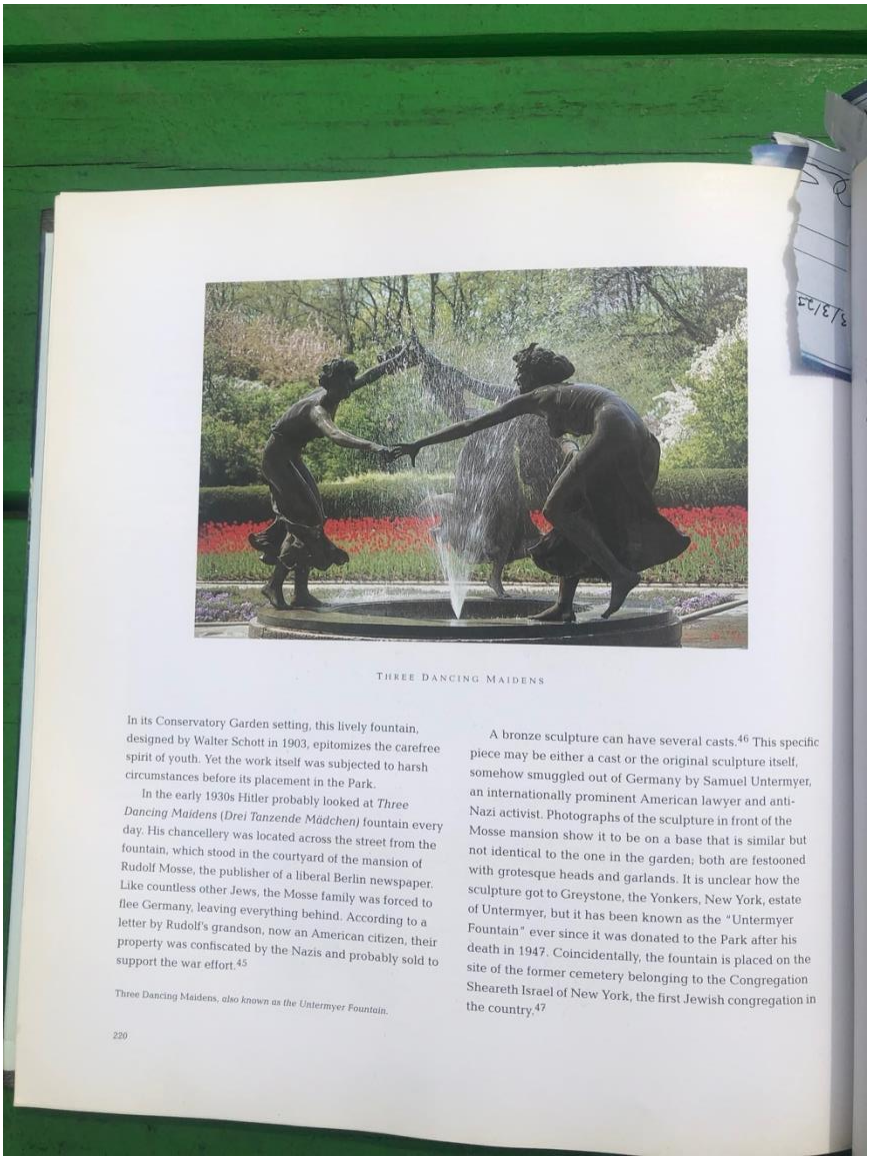


Photo 11: The book used in session one



THREE DANCING MAIDENS

In its Conservatory Garden setting, this lively fountain, designed by Walter Schott in 1903, epitomizes the carefree spirit of youth. Yet the work itself was subjected to harsh circumstances before its placement in the Park.

In the early 1930s Hitler probably looked at *Three Dancing Maidens* (*Drei Tanzende Mädchen*) fountain every day. His chancellery was located across the street from the fountain, which stood in the courtyard of the mansion of Rudolf Mosse, the publisher of a liberal Berlin newspaper. Like countless other Jews, the Mosse family was forced to flee Germany, leaving everything behind. According to a letter by Rudolf's grandson, now an American citizen, their property was confiscated by the Nazis and probably sold to support the war effort.[45]

A bronze sculpture can have several casts.[46] This specific piece may be either a cast or the original sculpture itself, somehow smuggled out of Germany by Samuel Untermyer, an internationally prominent American lawyer and anti-Nazi activist. Photographs of the sculpture in front of the Mosse mansion show it to be on a base that is similar but not identical to the one in the garden; both are festooned with grotesque heads and garlands. It is unclear how the sculpture got to Greystone, the Yonkers, New York, estate of Untermyer, but it has been known as the "Untermyer Fountain" ever since it was donated to the Park after his death in 1947. Coincidentally, the fountain is placed on the site of the former cemetery belonging to the Congregation Sheareth Israel of New York, the first Jewish congregation in the country.[47]

Three Dancing Maidens, *also known as the Untermyer Fountain.*

Photo 12: The section about the sculpture in the Conservatory Garden used in session one.

Photo 13: The pitch pipe used in session two.

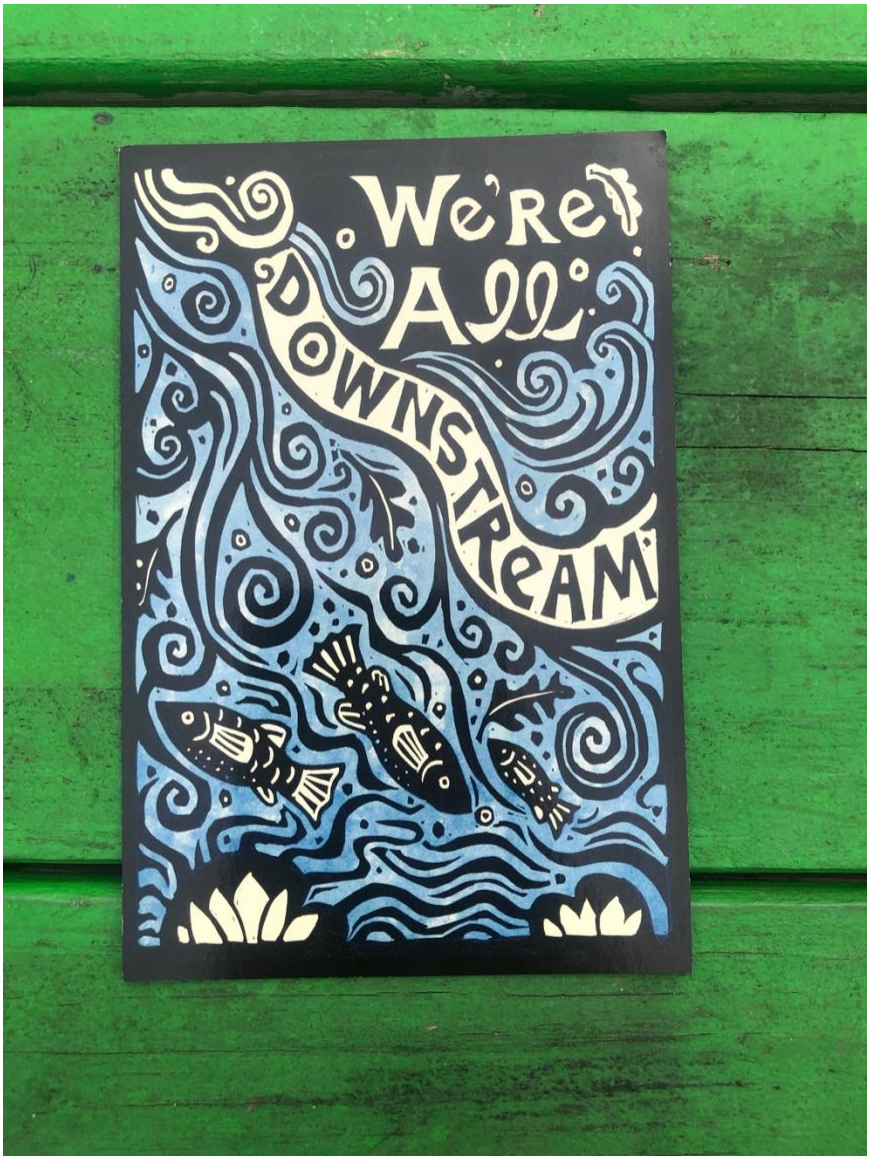


Photo 14: The postcard used in session two.

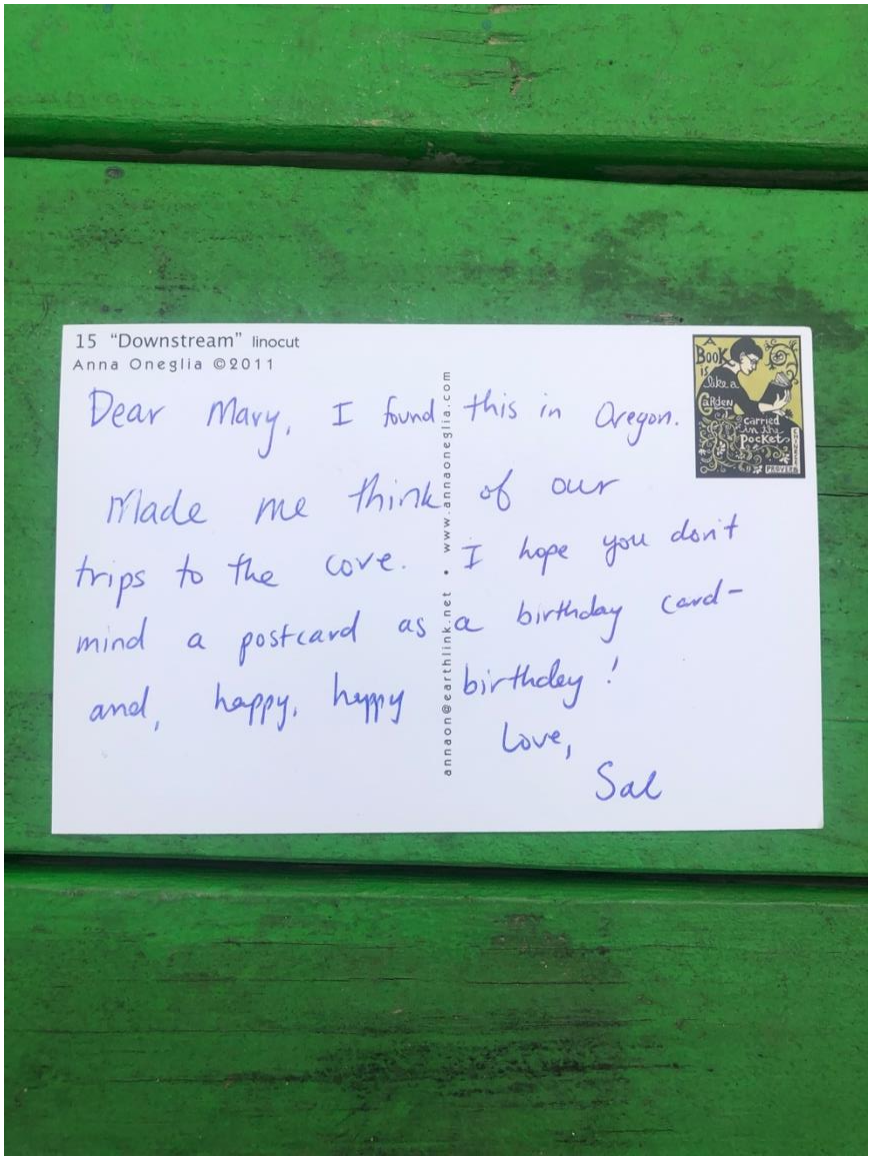


Photo 15: The back of the postcard used in session two.

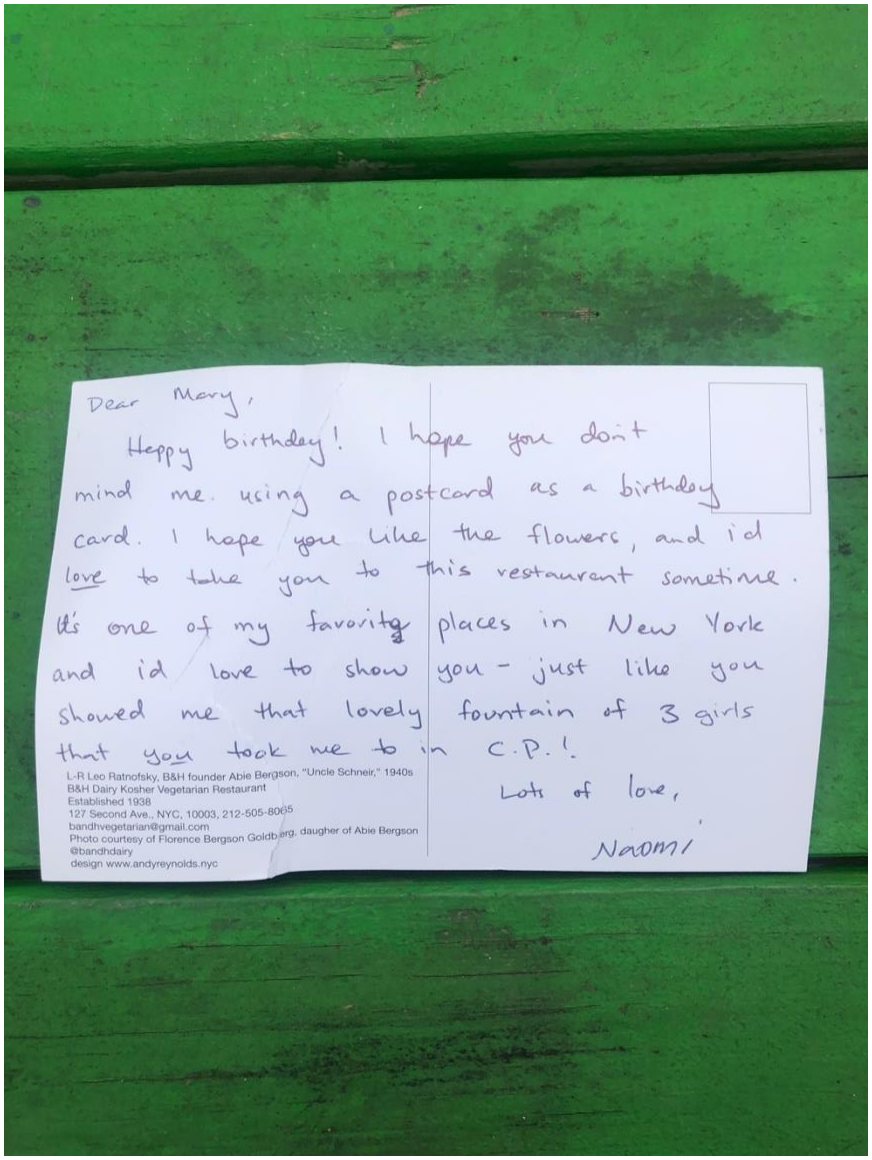


Photo 16:The back of the postcard used in session one.

Photo 17: The front of the postcard used in session one.

Photo 18: The front of the menu of the café visited in session one.

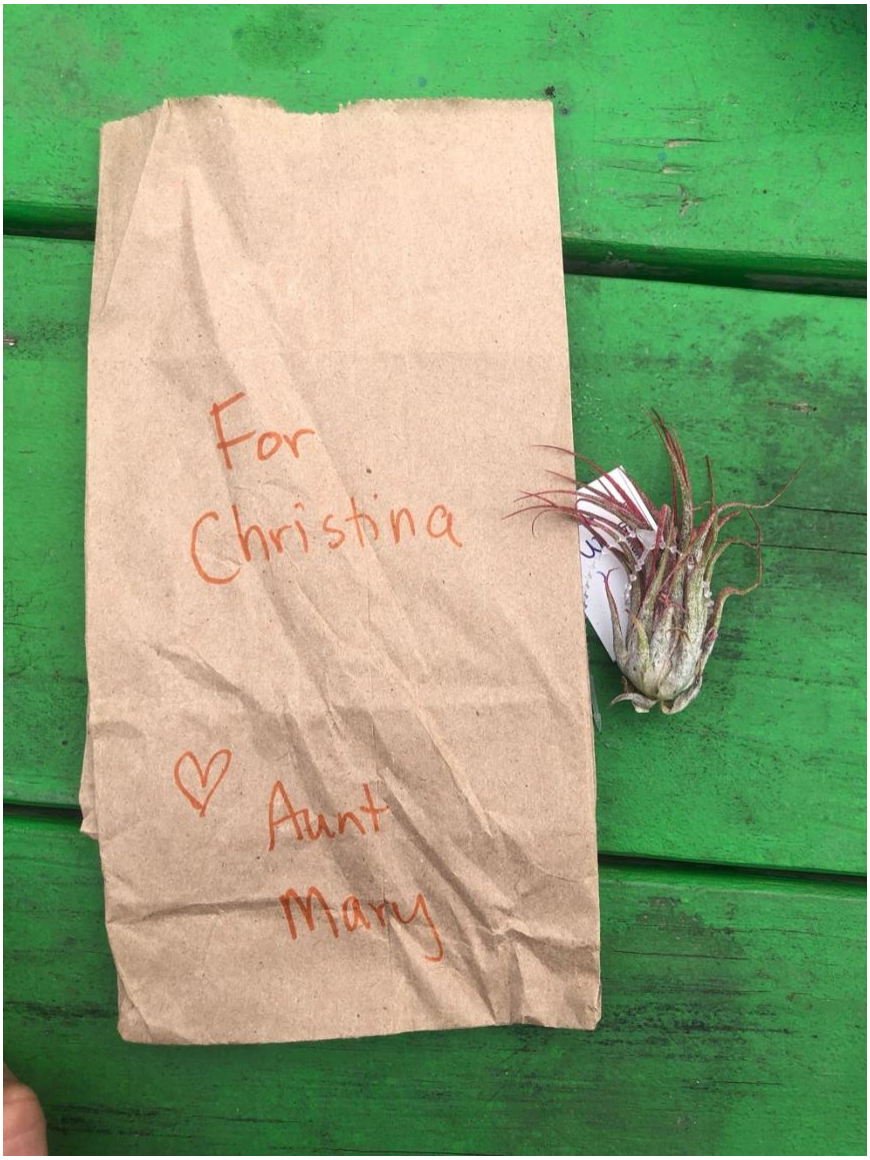


Photo 19: The paper bag and air plant used in session one.

Photo 20: The picnic tables and 'Eternal Flame' barbeque in Socrates Sculpture Park where we met in session three.