



Once Upon a Time We Were Trees...

*EDEN Engagement: Ann Arbor
Seed City Curriculum
Karilú Alarcon Forshee*

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ABOUT

Three-time Grammy Award winning opera superstar Joyce DiDonato has created the global tour of EDEN, her major concert hall performance about environmentalism. Her personal commitment and partnership with ITAC has launched a re-imagining of the impact of a concert experience through teaching artist-led workshops in every city. The International Teaching Artists Collaborative (ITAC) is the world-wide network of artists who work in community and educational settings, who have the skills to bring change to communities. Together ITAC and EDEN Engagement will pilot a new approach to prove that touring can be a legitimate and powerful tool for change in communities.

Cities on the tour are designated either "Root Cities" or "Seed Cities". Seed Cities are a 1-4 day(s) event that engages the youth with one of three specific environmental issues; Urban Gardens, Urban Trees, Food Choices:

1. Urban Gardens: They are youth-friendly. Among many social benefits, they bring these environmental benefits: reduce carbon use (reduced food transport); reduce water runoff; help pollinators; plants absorb CO₂ and pollutants and produce oxygen; health benefits in the food and the community building (reduced stress and blood pressure).
2. Urban Trees: Trees are omnipresent and overlooked in cities—kid friendly. They can plant them, and the EDEN performance encourages that. Trees are powerful answers to heat mitigation (reduce temperatures by 8 to 10 degrees and need for air conditioning), carbon and pollution sequestration and oxygen production, water flow pollution reduction, biodiversity, and food insecurity. Health benefits include healthier air, psychological benefits, lowering blood pressure and stress.
3. Food Choices: Scientists have proven that small choices make a big difference. Because many foods with a high health burden, including processed meats or red meats, also have high environmental costs, switching out 10 percent of a person's daily caloric intake can cut a person's food-based environmental footprint by over 30 percent. Between growing it, packaging it, moving it around, cooking it, and often wasting it, food production makes up about one-fifth to one-third of all annual greenhouse gas emissions globally. Eat less red and processed meats, eat more veggies and fruits, reduce food waste, and if you have a way...compost.

Teaching Artist: Karilú Alarcon Forshee

Duration: One 3-hour workshop

Goals: This workshop aims to activate two things in the young participants:

- Their sense of personal connection to and grasp of the specific environmental issue
- Their ability to make a difference regarding that issue—their sense of agency



Workshop: The Life of Trees

Opening:

- When kids enter the room, there will be two stations – one will have three dress gray jackets with markers next to it. In the jackets, later used as costumes, the kids will respond to the question: How do you feel when you are near trees?
- The other station will have pieces of cardboard with brown strings of fabric and markers next to it. These can be later used as props or costume pieces. In these, the kids will respond to the question: How can we protect the life of trees?

Welcome:

- Circle up for brief introductions (name, age, preferred pronouns and with one word, how are you feeling today?).
- Today we will explore the importance of trees, their positive impact on our lives and our world and how we can become an ally to their growth and continued existence. Together, we will create a piece of devised theater that will reflect our exploration through sound, text and movement.
- Key Question : How can we become an ally to preserving and supporting the life of trees?

Warm-Up Activity:

- The kids will be instructed to walk around the room at three different speeds. Speed will be measured from 1 to 5, the word rooted will indicate to stop and freeze. Some of the directions given will include:
 - Use your body to make the statue of a tree.
 - If that tree could walk/ move how would it move? Walk like your tree.
 - Use your body and make a statue of a seed.
 - Your tree is feeling very sad, walk like a sad tree. (switching emotions every time.)
 - How would your tree move if it was sunny, windy, cold etc?
 - If your tree could make sounds, what sounds would it make if
- _____ .
- (different scenarios would be given, for example: you would not have space to grow, there would be a lot of transportation traffic around you, there would be construction work around you.)
- If your tree was struggling and could talk, what would it say to ask for help?



Main Activity:

- The kids will be given the outline/ skeleton of a “play” that is in urgent need of content. The kids will devise the content, which will include text, sound and movement. They will be given a title for the play, Once Upon a Time, There Were Trees which is divided into three acts:
 - ACT I. The Gift of Trees
 - ACT II. The Threat to Trees
 - ACT III. The Dream of Trees
- The kids will be divided into three groups. The oldest kids will be assigned the role of leaders to help guide the groups. Each group will develop the content for a different act. The kids will have access to percussion instruments, strings of green fabric and the costume pieces they wrote on during opening, to use freely as they create their section of the piece. Factual text that supports each act will be also given to develop movement, dialogue and sound. Aside from factual text, each act will have a prompt to generate dialogue that reflects their thoughts on the content. In each act the characters are one human that interacts with the trees.



ACT I:

- Factual text – The benefits of trees.
- Prompt.- Tree perspective- How does it make you feel to provide all of these for the world?
 - Ex. How do you feel about providing oxygen for humans? "It makes me feel proud and useful. It gives me purpose."
- Human perspective- How does it make you feel to receive the gifts of trees?
 - Ex. How does it make you feel that trees provide oxygen for you to live? "It makes me feel grateful."

ACT II:

- Factual text- The stress factors.
- Prompt.- Tree perspective.- How does this make you feel?
 - Ex. How does the lack of room to grow make you feel? "It makes me feel desperate and scared I might not survive.!"
- Human perspective.- What would you respond to the tree? How do you respond to the struggle? How does it make you feel?

ACT III:

- Factual text.- Growing trees and keeping them alive.
- Prompt.- Tree perspective- This is how you can help me: _____, it would make me feel _____. I imagine a world where I _____.
- Human perspective: I imagine a world where we _____ and I support you by _____.
- The prompts are flexible and can be adapted to whatever the kids feel would best support the content. The prompts can be answered through sound, dialogue or movement.
- After each group has created their piece, guided by the Teaching Artist, we will have time to rehearse together as one group.





Culminating Presentation:

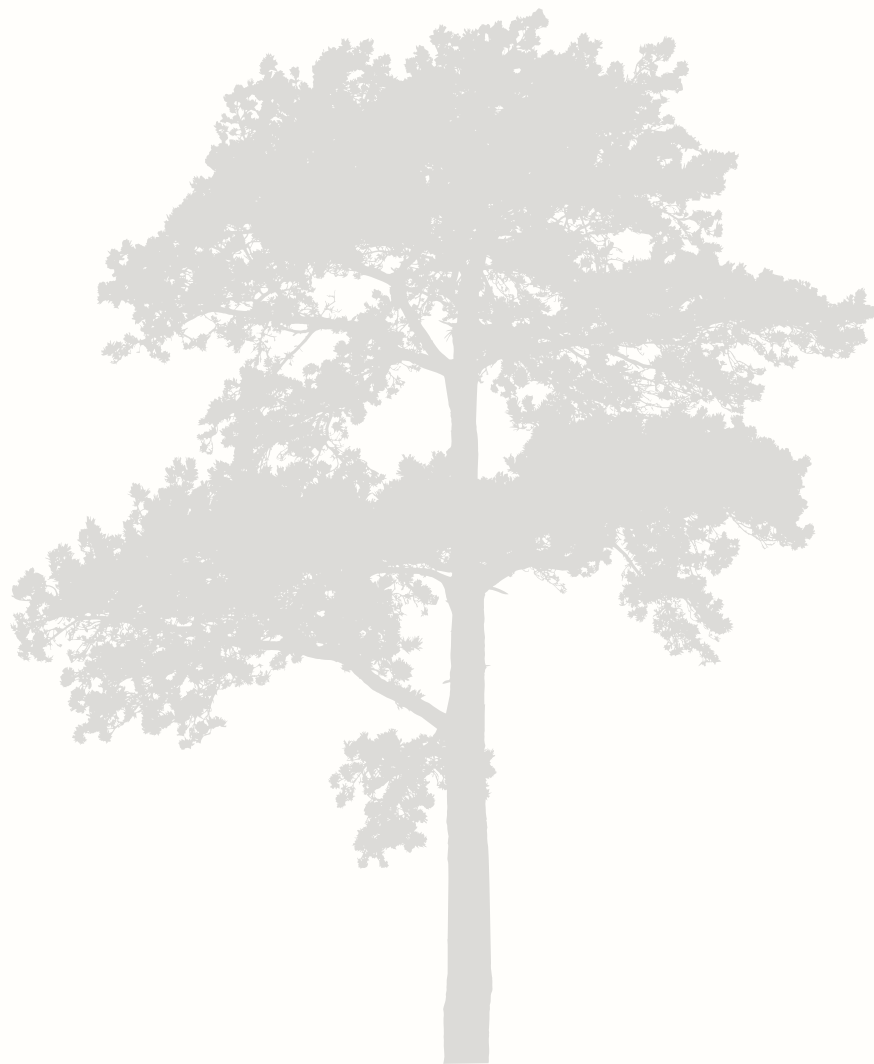
- We will culminate with a final performance of Once Upon a Time there were Trees.

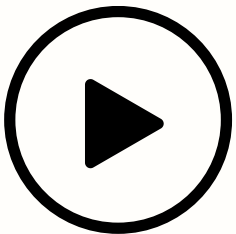
Reflection:

- Open group discussion – We will sit in a circle and bring back the questions from the opening and the key question of the workshop. After the experience we just had, how do you feel about having trees near you? Why do you think it is important to protect the life of trees and how can we become allies to preserving and supporting the life of trees?

Closing: Call + Response:

- Everyone stands up and we make a circle, and the artist teaches the following chant.
 - YOU AND I ARE PART OF THIS WORLD UH HUH
 - YOU AND I ARE PART OF THIS WORLD UH HUH
 - HOW ARE WE GONNA SAVE THE TREES UH HUH
 - HOW ARE WE GONNA SAVE THE TREES UH HUH
- Each kid, one at a time steps to the center of the circle and responds:
 - I SAVE THE TREES LIKE THIS! Making a body movement in three counts. (1x) which will be imitated by the rest of the group, who will then say:
 - WE SAVE THE TREES LIKE THIS (imitate movement). 1x
- After every kid has the opportunity to make a movement in the center, we will close everyone saying how they feel with one word.





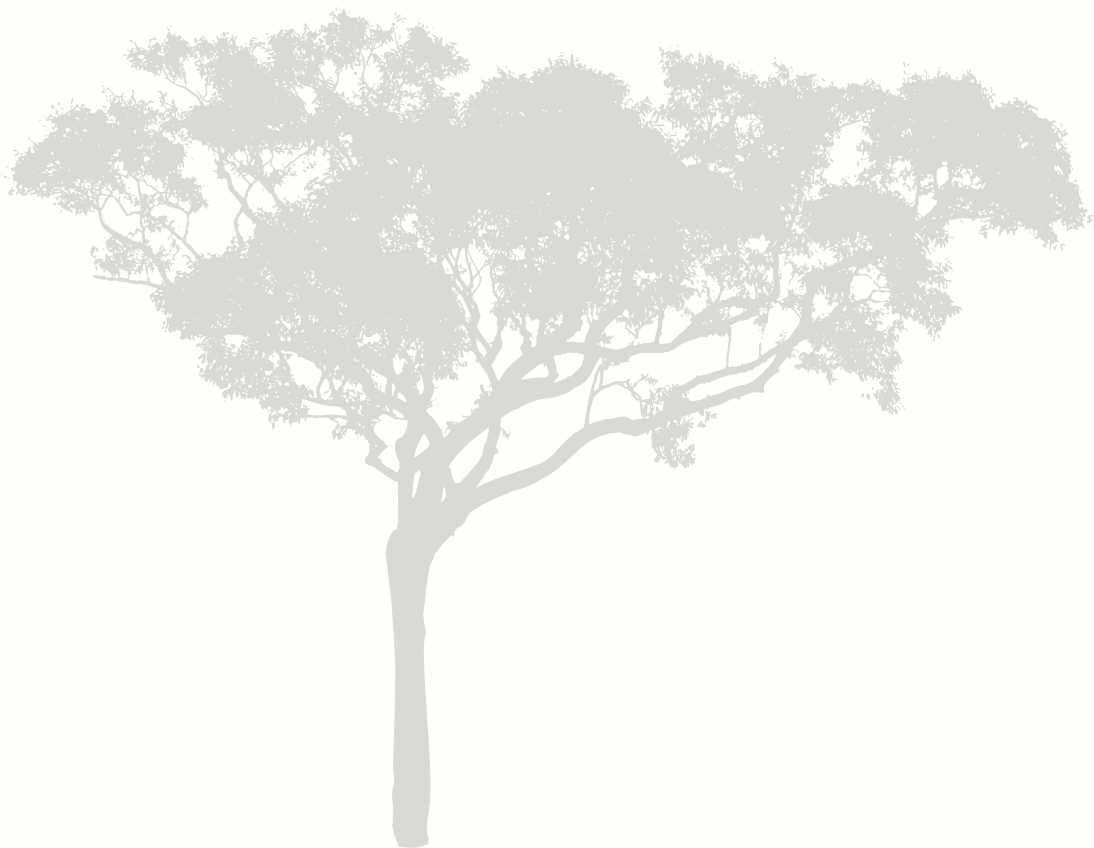
Watch
the
Video

Tree Facts

Benefits

- Trees can contribute to the increase of local food and nutrition security, providing food such as fruits, nuts and leaves for both human consumption and fodder.
- Trees play an important role in increasing urban biodiversity, providing plants and animals with a favorable habitat, food and protection.
- A mature tree can absorb up to 150 kg of CO₂ per year. As a result, trees play an important role in climate change mitigation. Especially in cities with high levels of pollution, trees can improve air quality, making cities healthier places to live in.
- Strategic placement of trees in cities can help to cool the air between 2 and 8 degrees Celsius, thus reducing the urban “heat island” effect, and helping urban communities to adapt to the effects of climate change.
- Large trees are excellent filters for urban pollutants and fine particulates. They absorb pollutant gasses (such as carbon monoxide, nitrogen oxides, ozone and sulfur oxides) and filter fine particles such as dust, dirt or smoke out of the air by trapping them on leaves and bark.
- Research shows that living in close proximity of urban green spaces and having access to them, can improve physical and mental health, for example by decreasing high blood pressure and stress. This, in turn, contributes to the well-being of urban communities. Trees improve social connections and reduce mental fatigue.
- Trees also help to reduce carbon emissions by helping to conserve energy. For example, the correct placement of trees around buildings can reduce the need for air conditioning by 30 percent, and reduce winter heating bills by 20-50 percent.

Mature trees regulate water flow and play a key role in preventing floods and reducing the risk of natural disasters. A mature evergreen tree, for instance, can intercept more than 15 000 liters of water per year. Trees improve the quality of stormwater entering rivers and streams.



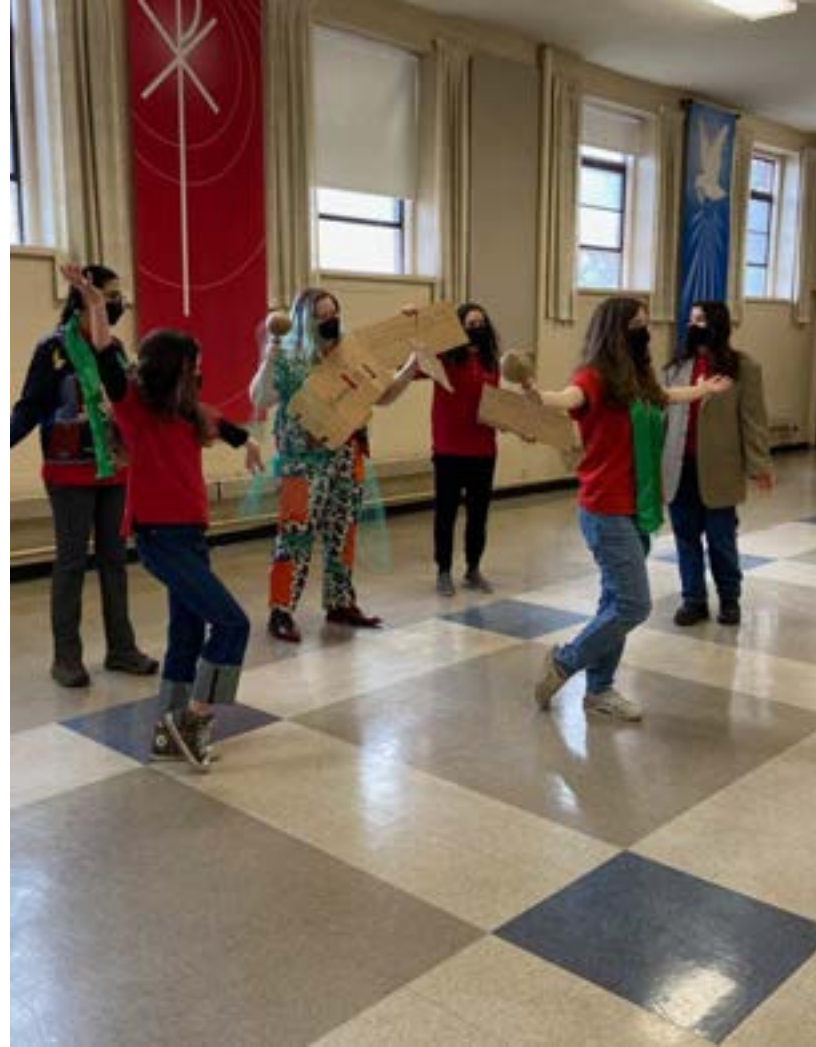
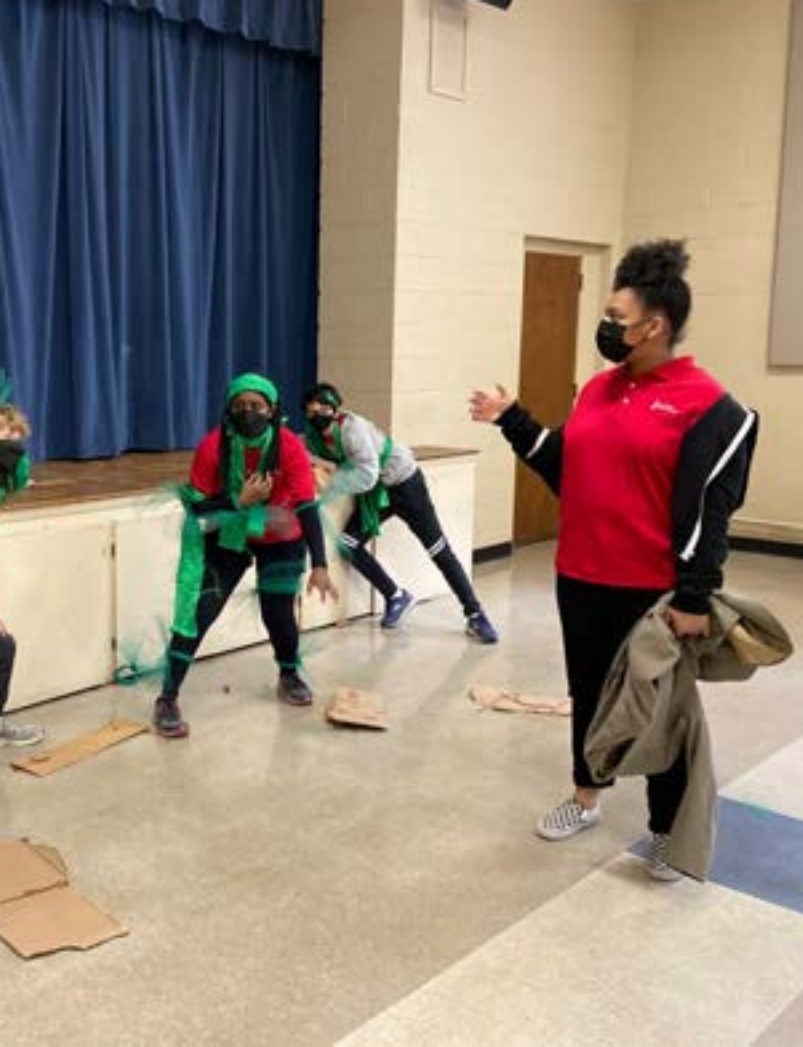
Stress Factors

- Dense Building
 - Soil Compaction is thought to be a substantial reason for tree mortality in cities.
 - This problem is caused by heavy traffic, common construction work, and dense buildings.
 - Limited access to sunlight
 - Limited space for root growth
 - Excessive heat accumulation
 - Limited space for upper branches to growth
- Artificial Building Materials
 - High soil pH
 - Urban heat island
 - degradation of soil structure
 - High sunlight doses due to reflection
 - Surface runoff
- Heavy Traffic
 - Air pollution
 - Soil compaction
 - Soil pollution
 - Reduction of plants growth area
 - Soil salinity due to winter deicing
- As our urban areas are so heterogeneous, not all trees will do well in all sites. However, the most ubiquitous constraint to healthy urban tree growth is soil compaction and limited accessible soil volume for roots, leading to stunted trees that cannot withstand increasingly hot and dry summers.
- A lack of tree diversity in urban areas has contributed to the build-up of insects and diseases that decimate urban forests.
- Compaction destroys fragile roots' ability to absorb water. It can eventually block water from entering the soil at all, turning the bed into an impervious surface. Soil compaction is very difficult to reverse.



Tree Preservation

- Thanks to many years of research, it is clear that poor practices in tree selection and soil preparation have reduced the potential benefits of planting urban trees. When a tree-planting project is envisioned, it is critical to assess site conditions to understand the constraints or opportunities for healthy tree growth.
- Reflected heat from built surfaces, soil degradation due to construction during development, and restricted rooting zones can be measured and evaluated.
- Pre-planting inventory of environmental conditions.
- Choosing the right tree and preparing or remediating soil.
- 'What is the best tree for my city?'
- A diverse urban tree population is essential for resilience in the face of some new insect or disease that may find its way into cities.
- Another approach to increasing tree health in the urban environment is to improve that environment, which means soil remediation.
- Reduce the density of soil that has been inadvertently compacted during the construction process.
- Develop a soil that can be compacted yet still allow tree roots to grow through it. Soil that underlays pavements and sidewalks must be compacted to bear the load of that pavement.
- Soils that are not required to bear the load of a pavement, yet have been compacted inadvertently on a construction site. With this technique, compost of a specified type is laid over the compacted soil. A bucket of a backhoe then digs down into the compacted soil, scooping up the compacted soil and compost and then dropping it back on the ground. This action creates veins of compost within the clods of compacted soil. Trees are planted into this and then annually mulched with shredded bark to maintain the added organic matter.
- Street trees require weekly watering May–October for the first two years after planting. Transplanted root systems are small and need time to establish. After that period, occasional watering during a drought will help them survive.
- Mulch assists by insulating roots and acting like a sponge to hold moisture. As wood chips break down, they add nutrients to the soil.
- Beautification. Many residents install homemade structures around their local tree beds. These are built for a variety of reasons: for aesthetics, to protect flowers or shrubs, to block litter from collecting, and to prevent dogs from entering.
- From the tree's perspective, however, the main reason to install a fence should be to prevent soil compaction.
- Each time someone walks across a tree bed, their weight condenses the soil. Urban areas often have intensely compacted soils due to decades of development.
- New trees should be held up with two stakes for the first year after planting. Recently transplanted trees have not yet grown structural roots in the surrounding soil. Stakes act like training wheels on a bike for the tree – they hold it up straight and steady it from falling over.
- Tree pruning involves the removal of broken, diseased, dead or crowding limbs. By pruning trees when they are young, we ensure that they grow up to be a strong, healthy canopy in the future.



"I loved our discussion towards the end. I did not expect so much participation and passionate discourse. Almost all participants were eager to share their thoughts about how and why they would be allies to the preservation and care of our environment."

—Karilú Alarcón Forshee

REFLECTIONS FROM THE TEACHING ARTIST

In what ways did you observe change in your participants understanding and engagement of the environmental issue you chose?

"Participants were eager to engage in discussion towards the end of the workshop. They expressed countless ideas to put into action regarding the theme explored."

The goal of this effort is to learn about the impact that the activities have on participants. We are especially curious to learn if there is any evidence that they have the impulse to take action and/or feel they can make a difference—this is the high goal of the arts-for-climate field, and we believe teaching artists have a particularly strong contribution to the field.

During the EDEN project, teaching artists were encouraged to use the [Continuum of Impact Guide](#) as a model when thinking about impact and assessment in their workshops.



We tasked each teaching artist with evaluating their students based on the Continuum of Impact Guide. They rated their students on a scale from 1 (no knowledge of the subject) to 4 (extremely knowledgeable about the subject). The following graph reflects Karilú's observations of her students.

Before the Workshop

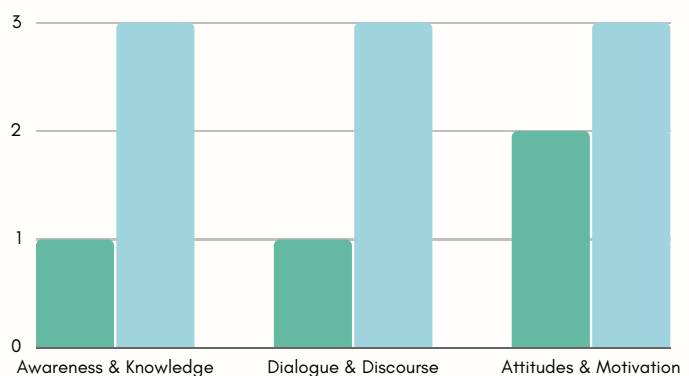
After the Workshop

1-No Knowledge

2-Some Knowledge

3-Knowledgeable

4-Extremely Knowledgeable





ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTIST

KARILÚ ALARCON FORSHEE

I am a Mexican performer and teaching artist, raised in the border town of Ciudad Juárez. I started taking singing, dance and acting classes when I was 8, appeared in my first show at age 11 and I never stopped. I graduated from the University of Texas at El Paso in 2009, with a degree in theater arts and English-Spanish translation. I have been a Detroit based artist since 2011 and a company member of the theater company A Host of People. Recently, I was honored to be recognized as a 2020 Detroit Kresge Artist Fellow. I am an interdisciplinary artist who finds joy in making experimental theater, singing and writing lyrics/ spoken work. My artistic work is influenced by the entire Latin American Diaspora and I find profound inspiration in my roots and the women in my familia. I create from there, and hope for trees to grow. My practice as a performer and teaching artist often meet along the route. Through my work I strive to create environments that inspire and nurture human connection and self-worth. This being the path to a strong sense of identity that breeds cultural voice and presence.

Artista y maestra Mexicana con enfoque en artes escénicas. Crecí y me forjé en la frontera de Ciudad Juárez . Empecé clases de canto, danza y actuación a los 8 años, y debuté en mi primer obra de teatro a los 11 años. No he dejado de hacer teatro desde entonces. En el 2009 me gradué de la Universidad de Texas en El Paso con licenciaturas en Teatro y Traducción Inglés-Español. Radico en el área de Detroit desde el 2011 y soy miembro de la compañía de teatro A Host of People. Recientemente recibí el honor de ser nombrada como una becaria de Kresge Arts Detroit. Soy una artista multidisciplinaria que goza infinitamente de hacer teatro, cantar y escribir tanto canciones como poesía. Mi trabajo es influenciado en gran parte por la diáspora Latinoamericana y encuentro profunda inspiración en mis raíces y las mujeres que forman parte de mi familia. Es desde esa inspiración e influencia que empiezo a crear, siempre con la esperanza de que germinen árboles. Mis prácticas como artista y maestra a menudo se entrelazan. Crear ambientes que nutren e inspiran la conexión humana y el autoestima es la esencia de mi trabajo. Fomentando así, una identidad fuerte que genere voz y presencia cultural.

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Choir
Ann Arbor Youth Chorale

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Concert Venue
Hill Auditorium

