



Gardening Your Story: Using Art for Environmental Justice

*EDEN Engagement: Kansas City
Seed City Curriculum
Madison Mae Parker*

APRIL 2022



International Teaching Artists Collaborative (ITAC)
and
Joyce DiDonato's

EDEN ENGAGEMENT

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:

- 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).
- 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.
- 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: Madison Mae Parker

- Duration: One day workshop 10–4pm

Workshop Goals: These workshops 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

Supplies:

- sticky notes
- white board/dry erase board (or big butcher paper if unavailable)
- markers
- pens
- paper
- bluetooth speaker for music
- box of cleaned trash
- scissors
- glue sticks

Potential Local Resources:

- KC Community Gardens
- Heartland Conservation Alliance
- Exploring Roots
- Bridging the Gap- Heartland Tree Alliance
- Compost Collective KC



WORKSHOP

Introduction + Welcome (30 minutes)

- Madison introduces self
- Students share name, what they are excited about for the day, and what flavor of icecream they are that day based on their mood.
- Community Agreements
 - My/their/our story is a gift.- you can share as much or as little as you desire. We are thankful for all of it.
 - Safe space / Brave space. - This is a safe space to be fully you. In the same note, it is a brave space. It is a radical thing to be vulnerable and honest; we hold that seriously and with grace. Brave space means that it is scary to show up, so let's be present to people, including call in with love and respect for the others. Let's have conversations together to learn and grow.
 - Active Listening and Active Respect. - be responsive to one another! It's scary to share your work! if there is a line that someone says that resonates with you, you could give a snap or just let them know later.. Active Respect- what do you think active respect is? Respect is not something we give one time and we're good, right? It's an ongoing dialogue that is present. Through respect, trust can hopefully be built. I respect each one of you in this space because you are humans with individual stories.
 - Value for every person and story. - Recognizing that just by showing up, you are an artist.
 - You are a creative. Recognizing that same gift in the other people in this space.
 - Consent- Sometimes people don't want feedback on their work! If someone shares a piece and you want to share a suggestion, make sure you ASK if they would like to hear your opinion. Sometimes sharing feels fragile after writing or making something, and we can't look at it like that yet. That's okay. Honor wherever the work and the other is at.
 - Is there anything we want to add to this as a group? Or questions about this?
 - Do we all agree to this?

Warm-up Theater Games:

- Little Sally Walker
- Crazy 8s
- What are you doing



Action and Art (20 min)

- Explain why we are here and ask students what they know
 - Environmentalism, climate, pollution, etc... These are all words we hear often in our media, in our lives, but what do we know about them?
 - What feelings come up for you when thinking about environmentalism? Or the climate?
 - What do you think about yourself/your art in relationship to climate issues?
 - What do you know about the following topics:
 - Community Gardens (see hand out if they want to know more)- For over thirty years, KCCG staff have assisted community and backyard gardeners throughout the Kansas City metropolitan area to improve nutrition, reduce food costs, combat obesity, increase physical activity, encourage neighborhood leadership, and promote locally grown and sustainable food. // 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).
 - Urban Trees: (see medforest handout and BTG hand out) 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.
 - Heartland Tree Alliance educates people about all the critically important benefits created by urban trees, why these trees need extra care, and the proper ways to give them that care. We also organize planting events, pruning events and tree care workdays so people can get involved. Since 2005, HTA volunteers have donated over 13,000 hours of time! The efforts put forth from these volunteers has enabled HTA to plant 17,874 trees, prune 3,264, and maintain an additional 2,527 trees by mulching or removing tree stakes.
 - 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.



- Compost Collective KC- CURIOUS HOW THE IMPACT OF COMPOSTING AFFECTS THE ENVIRONMENT? HERE ARE A FEW STATS:
 - ~25% of the 167 million tons of garbage (WHAT?!) that end up in landfills each year is food waste
 - In the United States, 30-40% of all food produced is wasted
 - Because food waste in a landfill decomposes without oxygen, it creates primarily methane gas as a byproduct
 - Food waste that decomposes as compost has access to oxygen because it is regularly turned and aerated. As a result, it releases carbon dioxide
 - Methane gas absorbs heat from the sun (effectively warming our planet) at 21-70x the rate of carbon dioxide
- What are our thoughts on all of these? What did you know about these topics before today? What do you think about them now?
- Choose a topic together or two groups choose two topics (depending on group energy)

BREAK- 10 minutes

Play trash sculpture game-15 minutes

- What do we communicate through our bodies? and how? and why? how does our posture change in different environments? What does it mean to see something upside down? Consider all the different ways you get to look at something.
- Madi will call out the different themes we just talked about, and I want you to use your body, posture, room, and trash box as resources for creating a sculpture around the theme. we will spend only 3 minutes on the first one, 2 minutes on second, and 1 minute on the third.
- You can collaborate if you want to
- Now we will make a sculpture again, going through the themes, and one person will start, and then we will add our own bodies to the sculpture

Exploration of theme options and theater games as to how these can be combined. (30 min)

- Explore other performing artists and writers' version of environmental work: Extinction Rebellion, Robin Wall Kimmerer, Erwin Wurm, etc.
 - What do you like/dislike/notice about all these different types of work?
 - Example one Carolina Caycedo-Vimeo be dammed project
 - What did we notice from this project? like, dislike?
 - What about colors? bodies? lack of bodies? what feelings did we have watching it?
 - Example two: Trash Room at Meow Wolf ; in progress photos ; finished product
 - Agnes Denes- Wheatfield: a confrontation
 - Ross Gay's essays: Hickories and Bird Feeding (my copy)
 - Climate Change Monologue
 - Poem: "Rise" by Kathy Jetnil-Kijiner and Aka Niviana



Groups get together to brainstorm about what they want their performance to be:

- Written, poetic, play, monologue, dance? What themes are you working with?
- What art gets you the most excited? What do you like performing? What intersections does that have with your environmental theme?
- What feelings do you have about your environmental theme?
- You don't have to have it all planned out right now! just some general words/ideas/ thoughts down!

Lunch

Return and Integration

- Crazy 8s
- Walk with me
 - This game will teach your teen to follow cues without being told and how to read body language.
 - Let all the teens stand around the room and start walking on a given signal. Make sure they walk all over the room and use up all available space. At another given signal, all the teens have to stop and freeze wherever they are.
 - Let them practice till they get the hang of it. Next, the teens will have to do the same thing but without being given a signal. They will have to read each other's body language and start walking as a group, and stop at the same time as well

Personal exploration and development

- Create a 3-5 minutes piece utilizing the information provided for your chosen topic, visual art, the trash props
- Who am I in relationship to this? What is the issue and how might I be involved? What specific talents do I have? What is unique about my perspective to this? Am I myself in this piece? Am I someone else?

Break (10 minutes)

Creation Time

- Okay, so we have our topic explored, what's next! Here is a hand out to review as you all create and workshop your pieces.
- What are you starting with? What type of piece did you and your group come up with ? Did you all have some words around it? If not, do some word bubbles to think of somethings
- If you are struggling to think of WHAT to make, what are some of your favorite pieces of art (music, books, whatever!) – throw those out, even if you are not working in that medium. What do you like about those? What did you dislike? How could you try on some of those things you liked here.
- Spend some time in creation using these as resources!

Break (10 minutes)

Play a light game to loosen up the muscles

- Talk about sound, posture, etc. in the performance
- Review performances, give critiques
 - What do you like? What are you proud of?
 - What feels unfinished?
 - What message are you wanting the audience to leave with? Do you think you were successful in that?
- Spend time allowing students to add and implement critiques and changes

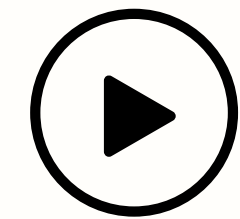
Final Performance

- Allow students time to perform their materials

Closing

- reflections- what take aways or things did you learn today? What did you like?
- body sculpture of receiptal
 - Give 15 second body sculpture about how it felt to create your project today
 - Give a 15 second body sculpture about how it felt to witness your peers' art today
 - Give a 15 second body sculpture about how you feel about environmental activism
- give 1 compliment or element of kindness to the person on your left





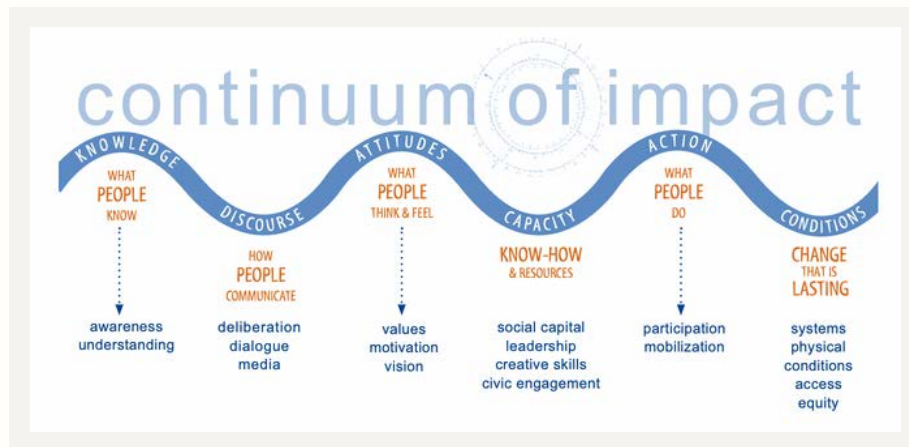
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Video

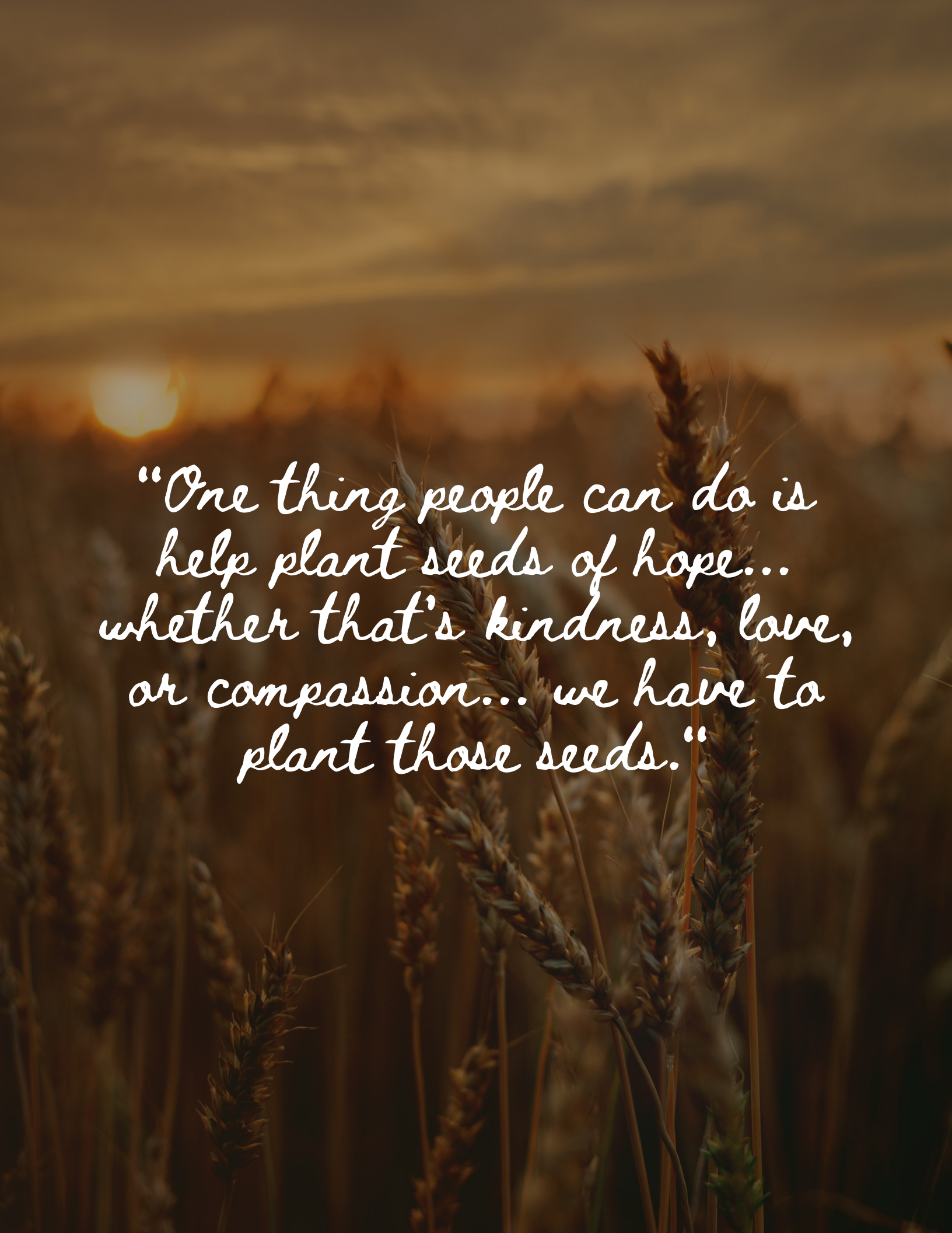


IMPACT & EVALUATION

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.



A photograph of a wheat field at sunset. The sun is low on the horizon, creating a warm, golden glow. Several wheat stalks are in the foreground, some in sharp focus and others blurred. A quote is overlaid in the center of the image in a white, cursive font.

*"One thing people can do is
help plant seeds of hope...
whether that's kindness, love,
or compassion... we have to
plant those seeds."*

REFLECTIONS FROM THE TEACHING ARTIST

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

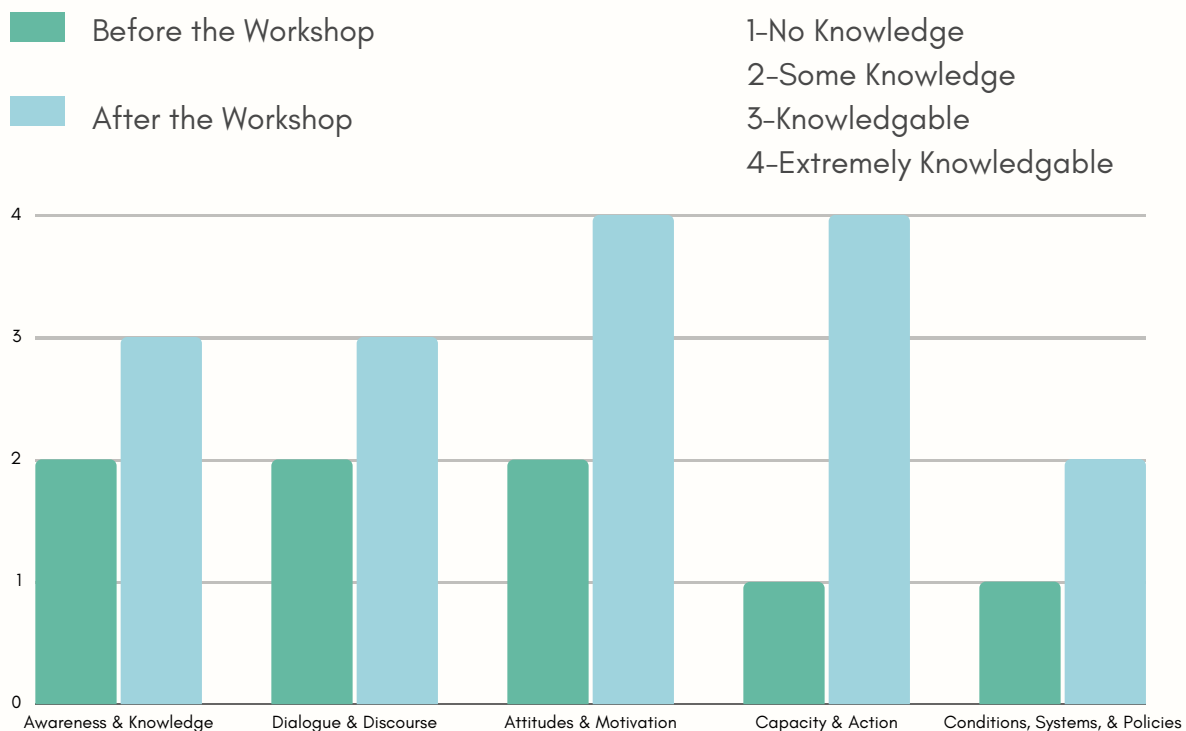
"The students each named their own issue they felt passionate about and found ownership through their own creative medium to work within. In the morning, we discussed how we felt emotionally thinking about the environment, which held a lot of sadness and isolation. By the end of the day, the students were aware of the destruction that the earth has experienced, but they were witnesses to their own creativity and the power that has— both as individuals and as a community."

What challenges did you face in creating and facilitating your workshop?

"There were not many challenges that I can recall. I had to cut a few items from my agenda due to time restraints, but I would always much prefer that than anything else. "

Did your EDEN experience expand your work or skills as a teaching artist in any specific ways?

"Yes— getting to work and teach towards a topic I normally do not teach within expanding my own skill set to think creatively about what is possible in the classroom. "



"There are two moments that come to mind as highlights. 1.) Emma jumped in and made a bracelet for me and her art collaborators that said, "Community." We spent the morning talking about how individual actions are important, but real change happens in community and collaborations. To see this student hold fast to this idea and include me in it was touching and impactful. 2.) Sophia, who was not as comfortable in the performing arts, but connects deeply to visual arts, immediately jumped into crafting a sculpture out of trash. To see the wheels of her mind turn as she explored what was possible from the supplies provided and combine it with her interests in community garden was a delight to see."

—Madison Mae Parker

ABOUT THE TEACHING ARTIST



MADISON MAE PARKER

Madison Mae Parker (she/her) is an artist, a performer, and a space-maker. Holding a BA from Texas A&M University in English Creative Writing, she owes her loud vocals and rambunctious laughter to her Texas roots. Her previous work has led her to Charlotte Street Foundation for a 2-year art residency, Mattie Rhodes Center as a teaching artist, Mic Check Poetry, a 501(c) serving as President, and Texas Grand Slam Poetry Festival as Director, along with other residencies and community organizing work. Having toured and taught internationally with her poetry and performance work in Australia, Europe, Canada, and Singapore, she feels most at ease while performing and facilitating rituals and conversations around the things that make us human. As a relational performer, she does not separate the audience from the performance, rather she seeks to bridge the divide by integrating movement, text, and visual art, allowing more people to engage with the work through various doorways. She is currently enrolled in the Tamalpa Institute (founded by Anna and Daria Halprin) to receive an Expressive Arts Therapy Certification. When she is not art-ing, you can find her watching anime and eating Hot Cheetos with her cats MeowZaki and Mochi. You can find out more of her work at madisonmaeparker.com or [@madisonmaeparker](https://www.instagram.com/madisonmaeparker)



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