



**WE ARE A WORK OF ART**

# **HEALTH + WELLBEING INITIATIVE**

**CIVIC WELLBEING  
TOOLKIT**



**WE ARE A WORK OF ART**



# WELCOME

Cool Culture is a BIPOC-led social justice organization that uses arts and culture to strengthen family and community wellbeing. Each year we have historically partnered with over 50,000 families from across the five boroughs who reflect the diversity of our city and thousands of educators from 450+ schools and early education programs. We collaborate with hundreds of cultural workers from 90 museums, historical societies, botanical gardens and science centers. The Cool Culture team brings together people from all walks of life — families and children, educators and artists, museum staff and government officials — to build cross-cultural understanding and advocate for positive social change. Whether you are new to Cool Culture or a longtime member, we are honored to welcome you into a community of New Yorkers committed to creating a more just and equitable city through the arts.

We face today's evolving challenges and losses knowing that the COVID-19 pandemic disproportionately harms BIPOC (Black, Indigenous, and People of Color) families who frequently have inadequate access to quality schooling and healthcare, not to mention to the arts. Yet our communities also have a long and rich history of cultural traditions designed to support one another during times of hardship. We bring the joy!

This is one of five Wellbeing Toolkits that are designed to support discussions about individual, family and community health and wellness, whether at home or while in schools, museums or other community spaces. Each Toolkit is informed by conversations with the Cool Culture network of families, educators and our partners across New York City.

**LET'S GET STARTED!**

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## WHY ART?

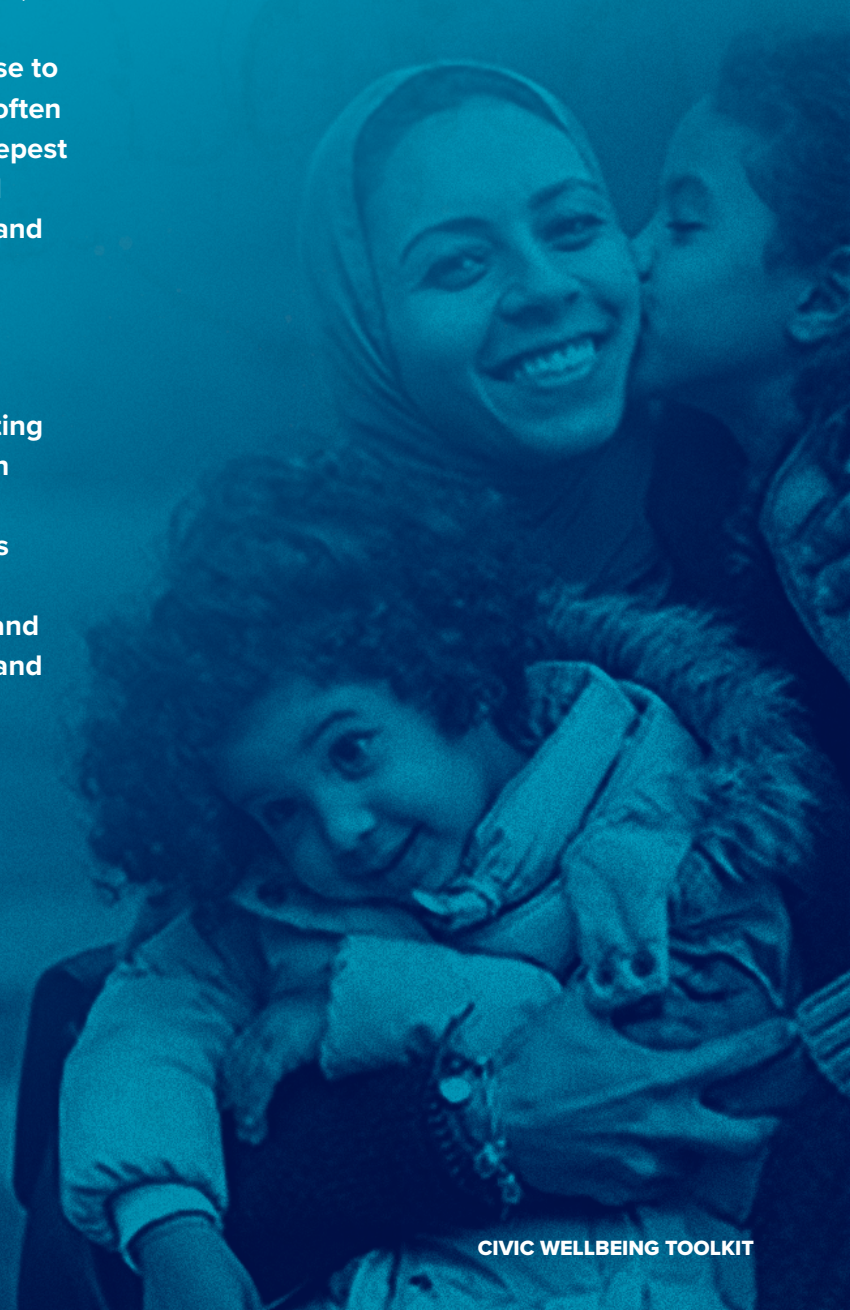
Art is a human right. It is a means of self-expression evoking joy, pain, empathy, hope, and freedom. Through art we pass on knowledge about our lives, values, and traditions; transcend boundaries between and across our cultures; and increase our capacity for dialogue and understanding. Art is practiced by everyone. It is everywhere: in our homes and cultural institutions, on gallery walls and on the sides of buildings, in theaters and at block parties. Art is healing. It amplifies our individual and collective power, helping us to make meaning in our present and create our futures.

## WHY CULTURE?

Culture is fundamentally shared and continually changing. It comprises the arts, institutions, practices, languages, and ways of knowing that individuals, families, communities and societies value and choose to preserve for the future. Like the air we breathe it is often invisible, but guides our interactions, values and deepest held beliefs. It is strengthened when people from all backgrounds intentionally come together to define and act upon their collective ideals.

## WHY FAMILIES?

Families embody culture, imparting language, enacting daily practices and following traditions their children receive in both formal and informal ways. They are their children's teachers and advocates having goals that straddle the past, present and future. Families draw on their wealth of knowledge, insights, skills, and experiences to build a foundation for their children and future generations.





# MEET THE TEAM

The pandemic is teaching us many things about what is needed to thrive in our homes, community, city — indeed the world. Some of the lessons have been deeply personal, others are reminders that our wellbeing is interconnected. A question our team has been thinking about, and one we want to pose to the Cool Culture community of families, educators, museum partners, artists, and others is: *What has the pandemic awakened in us?*



**CANDICE ANDERSON**  
Executive Director

Deep appreciation and gratitude for small moments: a favorite meal with family, a good read on the couch, a good laugh with neighbors, walks in the frigid New York City air while looking forward to spring.



**STANLEY DELVA**  
Institutional Relations Manager

I'm more intentional with my health and more aware of how I treat and maintain my relationships with the people around me and the world we're inhabiting. I'm often reminded during this pandemic of how community work begins with self-care.



**TRACEY GREENIDGE**  
Director of Development

As a wife and mom of two little ones, this pandemic has ignited a fighting spirit from deep within. I still find joy during life's most challenging moments, in dance-offs with my family, game nights, and stop motion movies produced by tiny fingers on my phone.



**ANNIE LEE**  
Director of Communications

I'm learning to give myself space to process grief. I've become more intentional about making time for joyful things like cooking with loved ones and writing snail mail.



**TRA NGUYEN**  
Program Manager

The desire to stretch and grow in ways I've only dreamed about, to uncover layers of myself, to surrender to healing, to slow it down, and to appreciate all of the little things that make up life.



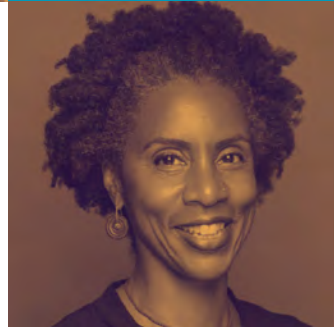
**FATIMA SHABBIR**  
Director of CityWide Initiatives

The pandemic has shown me the power of communal care and rest. It has affirmed that we must reimagine, co-create and invest in equitable futures for all.



**ALEXANDRA SHONEYIN**  
Program Coordinator

The pandemic has made me realize that we need to invest more in our local communities and preserve our resiliency, stories, and creativity.



**KANIKA SRINIVASAN**  
Senior Director of  
Operations & Strategy

The importance of connection to loved ones, the meaningfulness of nurturing these relationships, and appreciation of the time we can spend together.

**SUSAN WILCOX**  
Director of Programs

The pandemic has awakened in me the reminder that, for better or worse, we are one organism susceptible to the ways we abuse or nourish the earth - our sole home. The impact may be unequal, but not one of us is untouchable.





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## HEALTH + WELLBEING INITIATIVE

**The Health + Wellbeing Initiative** will bring us together to connect, create, imagine and act to invest in our individual and collective wellbeing, so that our community members come away with:

- **Deeper awareness of the current state of our wellbeing:** mind, body, spirit + civic engagement (and that of our family and communities).
- **Knowledge of the ancestral and indigenous wellness practices in our communities,** and our family traditions and practices as well as Western medical practices.
- **Awareness of the social dimensions of health** and the interdependent nature of our health + wellbeing.
- **Knowledge that health is a social justice issue** and how to access both indigenous and western health + wellbeing and civic engagement resources.
- **A vision of wellbeing for ourselves** (our family, our communities and our city) + an actionable first step to move towards this vision of the future.



# CIVIC HEALTH & WELLBEING

## USING OUR VOICES & OUR POWER

AUTHOR: CARLA SHALABY



Photo by Susan Wilcox

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Carla Shalaby is a former elementary school teacher, and now a researcher and writer on teaching and teacher education. Her personal and professional commitment is to education as the practice of freedom, and to imagining “classroom management,” especially in the early grades, as an opportunity to teach, learn, and model anti-carceral work, care work, community work, and collective work.

## WHAT HAS THE PANDEMIC AWAKENED IN YOU?

The pandemic has awakened a new level of commitment in me -- personally and professionally -- to raising children who understand that taking care of each other is vital to our collective survival. This model of just trying to privately protect ourselves and our own is unsustainable, unhealthy, and unlivable. The pandemic recommitted me to the promise of a world in which care work is public work, collective work, and freedom work.

## WHAT IS CIVIC HEALTH & WELLBEING?

Civics is about how we are, and what we do, as members of communities. We each belong to many communities including our families, our classrooms and schools, our neighborhoods and cities, our countries, our world, and our planet. **When we are civically healthy, we participate actively and responsibly in our communities. We behave in ways that support the rights of all people and other living things to be healthy, happy, and whole.**

When we take care of our civic wellbeing, we know our rights and responsibilities. We use our voices and our power to make sure things are fair and safe for everyone. And we work together with others to make change in our communities when change is needed.

WE ARE A WORK OF ART



Think Moment

**What is one community you belong to? Who are the people and other living things that you share your community with?**



# YOU ARE POWERFUL

Some people think civics is only about the **government**, and that people who work in government—like mayors, police officers, the President, teachers, and others—are the only people who are in charge, who get to make decisions over our lives and communities. It is true that those people have power and that they can use their power to help people, to harm people, or both.

But it is also true that **YOU** have power. **Every person has power, no matter their age.** And every person can use their power to harm others, to help them, or both.

You have the power to make life happier and healthier for members of your community and for all living things, through:

- **the everyday things you say and do**
- **the actions you take to fight for fairness**
- **the ways you take good care of yourself and other living things**

There are some unfair things that happen that we might not be able to completely stop or fix. But together with others we can stand up against injustice and **make demands** for fairness so that over time, things change and the children who come after you can see a more fair world. When people get together to make demands for change, this is called **organizing**.

**Organizing is one of the most important and powerful ways that regular, everyday people like you and me can be most powerful against harmful and unfair things.** We are mightier, or stronger, when we work with others who share our ideas about how to make the world more fair and healthy. Many people who came before us, including many of our elders and ancestors, organized to make demands for the world to be more fair and free for you and for other children. Their activism was brave and courageous. Fighting for justice is never a thing of the past, though. It goes on forever, and when people are civically healthy, they figure out how to join in to do their part to make the world more full of love and justice. If you look around you in your community, country, and world, you will find many mighty people working together right now this very minute to organize against unfair things.

Because you are powerful, the things you do and say can help others, but you can also sometimes harm others. When you are civically healthy, you know how to apologize, to take responsibility and admit when you are wrong, and to make things right when you accidentally use your power to hurt or harm your community. Being powerful means knowing your rights—what you deserve from others, and also knowing your responsibilities—what others deserve from you.



## Think Moment

**Can you think of a time you were powerful? Maybe you did or said something to make things more fair? Maybe you helped to care for another person or living thing? Maybe you apologized and made things right after causing harm?**



# YOU CAN USE YOUR VOICE

Voting is one important way that people can make their voices heard. Voting is how we choose the people who we trust to take good care of our communities, whether in your school's Parent Teacher Associations, your building's tenant association, in government, or in many other areas. It is important for people who are able to vote to use that right as one way to be heard. But many people are not allowed to vote, including children, because you have to be 18 years old to vote. While some groups of people cannot vote, they can still influence how other people vote, and children can do many other things to make their voices heard.

When we make our voices heard, we exercise our civic health. **Our voice is a powerful civic muscle, and it needs exercise just like the muscles in our body!** Our voice doesn't just come out of our mouths. You use your voice anytime you use your mind, body, spirit, and power to make a difference in community with others. Our voice is about what we believe, want, and need in order for our communities to be healthy, happy, and whole. Our voice can come out in many forms, through:

- **our artwork**
- **signs we make and hold up in protests or put up on our windows**
- **our feet when we march for our rights**
- **our arms when we hug and hold other members of our communities**
- **our hands when we water plants and grow our own food and gardens**

# YOU HAVE RIGHTS AND YOU HAVE RESPONSIBILITIES

We are citizens of all of our communities because we are members of those communities with rights and responsibilities. The government does not count every person as a citizen, but many people are organizing right now to demand rights for people who are not allowed to become citizens under current laws. **As members of a community we must behave like citizens, which means knowing and demanding our rights, and knowing our responsibilities and duties to others.**

Another way to think of how we might behave in community with other living beings is to understand ourselves as stewards. When we steward something – a garden, a body of water, a community, a family – we take care of it, lovingly and with respect, and we help make sure others take care of it, too. When any living thing suffers, we all suffer. Stewardship reminds us of our connections with and responsibilities to other living things.



## Think Moment

**What are some messages YOU want to spread about how to make the world more fair, safe, or healthy for people and other living things?**



## Think Moment

**What are some of your rights? These are things you deserve to have, do and feel. What are some of your responsibilities? These are things you need to do to take good care of yourself, your community, and the planet.**



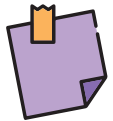
# ACTIVITIES TO INSPIRE CIVIC WELLBEING

## RIGHTS & RESPONSIBILITIES PAPER CHAIN-MAKING ACTIVITY



### MATERIALS:

- Strips of printer paper or construction paper
- Stapler, tape, or glue
- Writing and coloring tools



### INSTRUCTIONS:

- 1) Choose a strip of paper and write one RIGHT that you think all living things should have. Decorate the strip of paper to show or tell about that right.
- 2) Make a circle with that first strip of paper, with your words or drawings facing the outside, and secure the circle shape with tape, glue, or a staple.
- 3) Then take a second strip of paper. Think: for everyone to have that right, what is my RESPONSIBILITY? What can I do to make that right more fair or accessible to my community? Decorate that second strip of paper to show or tell about that responsibility.

#### **For example:**

**One right:** All children have a right to play.

**One responsibility:** I have a responsibility to share toys.

- 4) Loop the second strip of paper through the first strip's circle shape, with the text and illustrations facing outward. Secure the second circle shape with glue, tape or a staple, to start building a chain of paper circles.
- 5) On your next strip in the chain, you can either start with another right, or list an additional responsibility that goes with your first right.

When you're finished, you'll have a physical collection of rights that you believe everyone should have, and actionable responsibilities that you and your child can take to use your voices.





# NURTURING THE CIVIC HEALTH & WELLBEING OF YOUNG CHILDREN

## SOME SUGGESTIONS FOR CAREGIVERS

**Recognize young children as already powerful.** Young children need not wait until they are grown to flex their activist muscles. We can work to support children in practicing their activism in developmentally appropriate ways today, right now. Children are powerful already, no matter their age, because they are members of multiple communities with the power to help and/or to harm the other living beings with which they come into contact. Recognizing and affirming their power—and supporting them to channel it with care and responsibility—is a great gift from caregivers to the world.

**Grow children's orientation to civic health through the language of rights and responsibilities.** Young children are quite sensitive to questions of fairness, especially when they experience a slight or mistreatment. We can model and practice the language of civics by supporting children at an early age in understanding that the only way for all people to have their rights respected is for all people to be mindful of their responsibilities. When a child has a toy taken away by another child, for example, and feels it has been unfair, we might say, “It feels so upsetting when that happens. You have a right to have fun, and you also have a responsibility to share so that others can have fun. How can we check to see if things are fair?”

**Immerse children in stories, experiences, books, and images that capture the forms of civic engagement you value.** Children are powerfully impacted by curated and supported exposure to examples of activism, organizing, social movement, and civic engagement. This toolkit includes suggested books and other media that expose young children to ideas and images that support the development of their civic health and wellbeing. Young children can, do, and will learn about injustice. It is important that they learn these truths alongside multiple, consistent, ongoing examples of people - especially children - who struggle against and resist injustice.

**Remind children that civic health and wellbeing is about how we be, not just what we do.** At heart, civics is about how we move and behave in community. Who are we as public people? How do we behave in ways that protect the rights of all living things to be healthy, happy, and whole? How do we demand and defend our own needs while also considering the collective good? Civic engagement is everyday; not episodic. We do activism through the work of how we treat our families, how we look out for our neighbors, how we grow our gardens, how we take care of our elders, when we speak up and when we listen, and how we make apologies. Orienting children toward how they show up in and for community, as members of a collective of living things, is how we support civic health, wellbeing, and development.





# RESOURCES TO INSPIRE WELLBEING

Throughout We Are a Work of Art, Cool Culture will share resources identified by our network of families, educators, artists, museum partners and other community leaders. These resources were chosen to direct you to support, information and opportunities for healing as needed.

## CIVIC WELLBEING AND ENGAGEMENT

- **Art of Protest: Creating, Discovering, and Activating Art for Your Revolution by De Nichols**

Artist De Nichols takes us on a journey to look at protest art from around the world and discover the power of words and art in social justice movements. From logos and posters to internet memes and protest zines, explore how you and your family may want to start making, creating and advocating for change. Find this and other arts and activism books at your local library.

- **Community Gardens at NYC Parks**

NYC's community gardens are urban green spaces created and cared for by city residents who are stewards of underutilized land. Locate a community garden and meet local neighbors, and get involved in creating and evolving green public spaces with your family. <https://greenthumb.nycgovparks.org/gardensearch.php>

- **Contact Your City Council Member**

Your local elected City Councilmember has an office with staff dedicated to help residents with a range of services and issues. Some districts take part in Participatory Budgeting, where local residents decide how to spend at least \$1 million of the council member's public budget each year. Find your district by address here and get in touch: <https://council.nyc.gov/districts>

- **Find Your Government Representative**

Contact local, city, and state officials who represent you to share your ideas and concerns and seek solutions, from local community boards to state-level legislators. [www.mygovnyc.org](http://www.mygovnyc.org)





- **IDNYC**

IDNYC provides the peace of mind that comes from having a broadly accepted government-issued photo identification, regardless of your immigration status. It is a recognized ID for New York City residents to access and interact with NYC agencies that provide public services, affordable housing, employment, health care and more. It can be used as your public library card and to open a bank account at select financial institutions. Call 311 and say “IDNYC” or visit the website: [www1.nyc.gov/site/idnyc/about/about.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/idnyc/about/about.page)

- **Kids on the March: 15 Stories of Speaking Out, Protesting, and Fighting for Justice by Michael Long**

From the March on Washington to March for Our Lives to Black Lives Matter, these powerful stories of children-led protests in America show how children have always been activists. Long before they could vote, children have spoken up, marched, gone on strike, and even launched movements.

- **NYC Civic Engagement Commission**

The Civic Engagement Commission’s goal is to enhance civic participation, promote civic trust, and strengthen democracy in New York City. Find out how you can be involved with local representative groups to impact relationships with and decisions about public education, local police precincts, city funding, and more. [www1.nyc.gov/site/civicengagement/about/about.page](http://www1.nyc.gov/site/civicengagement/about/about.page)

- **Voter Registration**

To participate in local and national elections, make sure you’re registered to vote! While you have to reach age 18 to vote, you can start registering at age 16. Call 1-800-FOR-VOTE (1-800-367-8683) for a voter application or view eligibility online and download an application. [www.elections.ny.gov/VotingRegister.html](http://www.elections.ny.gov/VotingRegister.html).

## RESOURCES FOR CHILDREN

- **A is for Activist by Innosanto Nagara**

Using the alphabet to frame values with rhyme, the book encourages our children to grow up with confidence in themselves and to be proactive citizens who are passionate about causes from environmental issues to LGBTQ rights and civil rights.

- **Antiracist Baby by Ibram X. Kendi**

With bold art and thoughtful yet playful text, the book introduces our youngest readers and the grown-ups in their lives to the concept and power of antiracism. Providing the language to begin critical conversations at the earliest ages, the book shares steps for building a more equitable world.

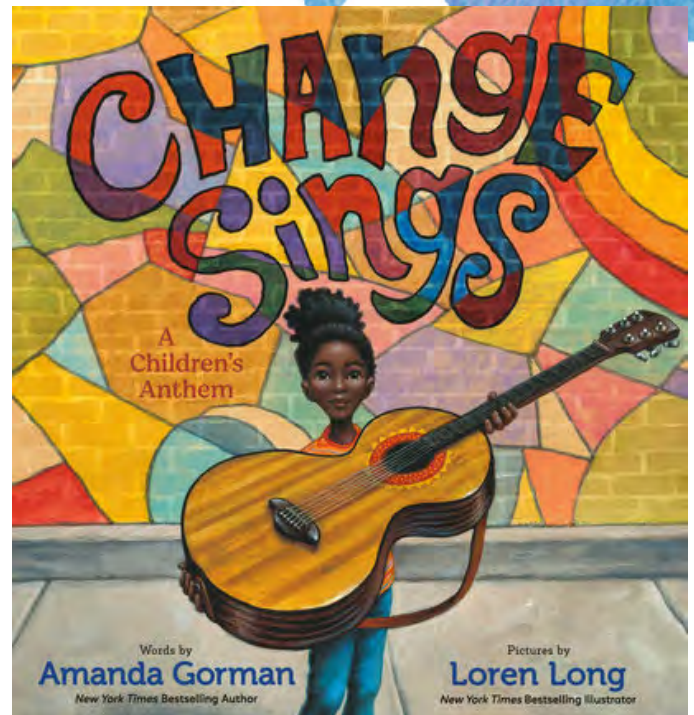
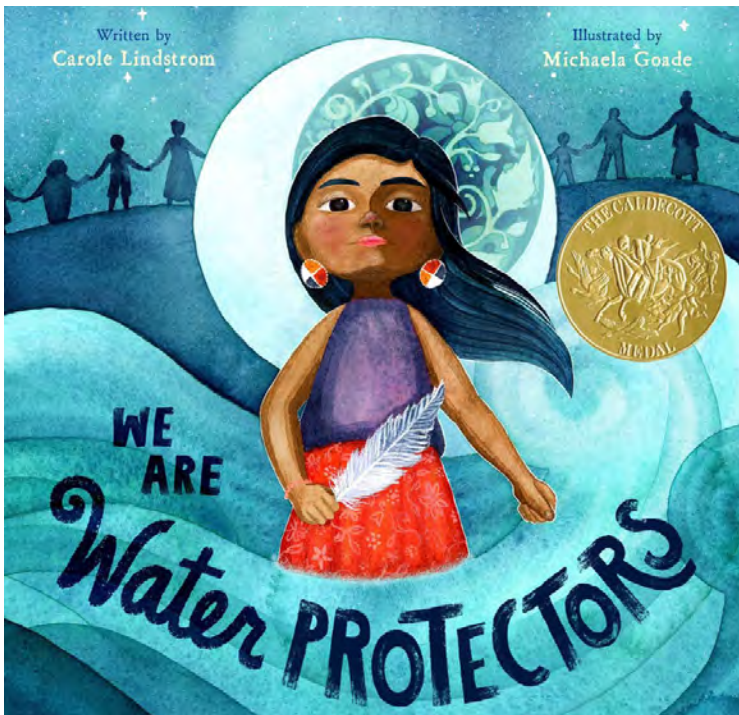
- **Change Sings by Amanda Gorman**

As a young girl leads a cast of characters on a musical journey, they learn that they have the power to make changes—big or small—in the world, in their communities, and most importantly, in themselves.

- **Counting on Community video by Innosanto Nagara**

Watch children’s book author Innosanto Nagara read out loud his illustrated book Counting on Community while he also encourages us all to be counted in the next US Census. YouTube link: <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=e5uq96YDqMY>





- **I Have the Right to be a Child by Alain Serres**

A read-aloud of a children's rights book by a Kids' Book Buddy, Arya on YouTube. Follow along as Arya explains why he loves this book and read along: <https://youtu.be/E8pb51JA7D8>

- **Just Ask by Sonia Sotomayor**

U.S. Supreme Court Justice Sonia Sotomayor celebrates the different abilities of children and people of all ages. She writes about children with all sorts of challenges—and looks at the special powers they have—as they work together to build a community garden.

- **Milo's Museum by Zetta Elliot**

Milo is excited about her class trip to the museum, where her grandpa says the space holds “all the things that people feel are valuable or important.” But she gradually realizes that the people from her community are missing from the museum. When her aunt urges her to find a solution, find out how Milo takes matters into her own hands.

- **We Are Water Protectors by Carole Lindstrom**

“Water is the first medicine. It affects and connects us all...” Inspired by Indigenous-led movements across North America, this story is of a child standing up for environmental justice and issues an urgent rallying cry to safeguard the Earth's water from harm and corruption.

Look out for other **Cool Culture Toolkits** around **Mind, Body, and Spirit** with more in-depth resource lists and activities for families and educators.

As part of the **We Are A Work of Art Health + Wellbeing Initiative**, they will contain frameworks for assessing wellbeing while providing art-making activities that can inspire conversations around different states of wellbeing and healing.

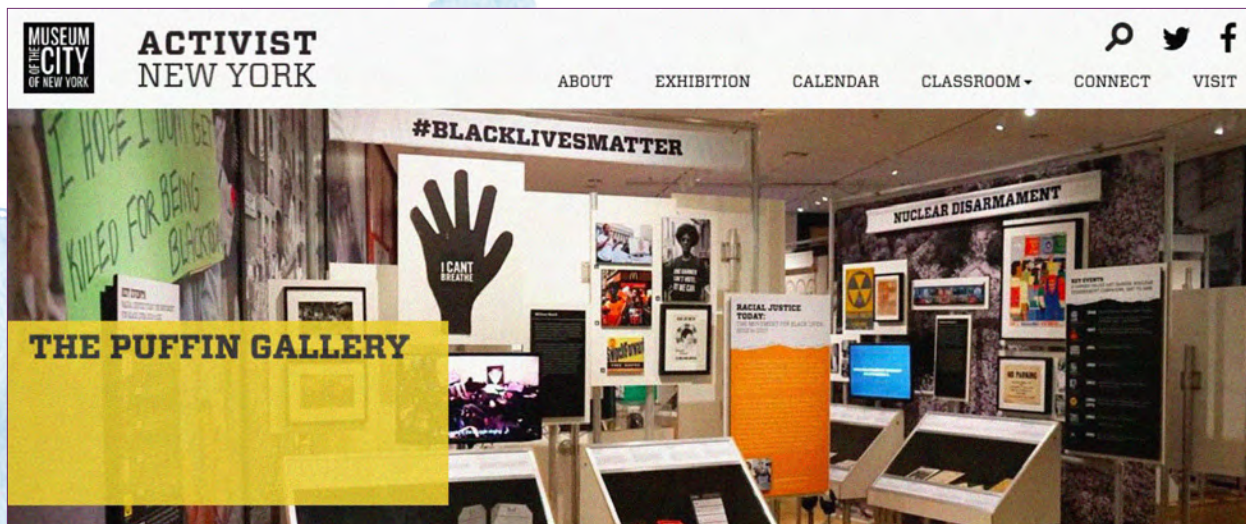


# FEATURED PARTNER

Which NYC cultural institutions are inspiring us to process our states of wellbeing and inspire action around mind, body, spirit or civic engagement right now?

Museum of the City of New York has continuously updated its Activist New York exhibition, launched in 2012, to reflect the evolving ways New Yorkers use their voices to advocate for justice. You and your family can visit MCNY and nearly 90 other museums, gardens and zoos for free with your Cool Culture Family Pass. View updated visitation guidelines on our Cultural Partner Visitation Portal: [bit.ly/VisitCoolCulturePartners](https://bit.ly/VisitCoolCulturePartners).

**Museum of the City of New York**  
1220 Fifth Avenues (at 103rd Street)  
New York, NY 10029



## ACTIVIST NEW YORK AND ART INSTALLATION RAISE YOUR VOICE

Activist New York is an ongoing exhibition at the Museum of the City of New York about the city's history of activism and the people who have propelled social change from the 1600s to today. New Yorkers have banded together on issues as diverse as civil rights, wages, sexual orientation, and religious freedom. This spring, an adjacent interactive installation "Raise Your Voice" by Amanda Phingbodhipakkiya depicts the resiliency of New York's Asian American and Pacific Islander community, with original artwork of activists and allies Yuri Kochiyama and Malcolm X.



In June 2022, families can use their Family Pass to join MCNY for "Freedom Week: A Journey into Art & Activism" for visual and performing arts, spoken word, poetry, and dance that explores the role of arts in the pursuit of justice, equality and freedom for all.

### **Invite your child to reflect:**

***Do you see anything at the Museum of the City of New York that reminds you of your family or your community?***

***What do you think civic engagement looks like? What is a social issue in your life, school, or community that you want to advocate for?***



# STAY CONNECTED

## JOIN US

Cool Culture partners with Title I elementary schools and early education centers to co-create programs and activities with families and educators that ignite our emotional, intellectual and political imaginations.

Through a partnership with Cool Culture, families sign up through their school or child care center to utilize the Family Pass. The pass offers a range of arts and cultural activities through free access to nearly 90 museums, gardens and zoos — places like the Brooklyn Museum, El Museo del Barrio, the Central Park Zoo and much more!

Donate to support our work: [www.coolculture.org/donate](http://www.coolculture.org/donate)

## THANK YOU

Cool Culture's programs are made possible by generous donors like you. As a 501(c)3 nonprofit organization, we rely on public and private donations to build capacity for over 50,000 families, educator partners, and museum staff to connect, create, and collectively evolve art and culture within and beyond institutions.

### Cool Culture, Inc. is Supported By:

Capital Group; Cooper Family Foundation Inc; Louis and Anne Abrons Foundation; Mid Atlantic Arts Foundation; Morris and Alma Schapiro Fund; New York City Department of Cultural Affairs in partnership with The City Council; PHILLIPS Auctioneers LLC; The Bay and Paul Foundations; The Cornelia T. Bailey Foundation; The Emmanuel Baptist Church Mission and Benevolence Fund; Fisher Brothers Foundation; The Hyde and Watson Foundation; Laurie M. Tisch Illumination Fund; The Cooper Foundation; Charles Kaplan Fund of the Mayer and Morris Kaplan Family Foundation; National Endowment for the Arts; New York City Department of Youth and Community Development; The New York Community Trust & The Beth M. Uffner Arts Fund; New York State Council on the Arts; Verizon; Cool Culture's generous Board of Directors; and countless individual donors.

### BOARD OF DIRECTORS

Candice Anderson (Executive Director), Dr. Dixie Ching, Jared Cooper, Cathy Elkies, Samantha Gilbert, Dr. Christopher John Godfrey, Rob Krulak, Risa Meyer, Edwina Meyers, Lynne Toye, Jonathan VanAntwerpen, Ahmed Yearwood

Cool Culture envisions an equitable society that values, embraces and is enriched by all cultures. Our mission is to amplify the voices of families and to strengthen the power of historically marginalized communities through art and culture, both within cultural institutions and beyond.



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@CoolCulture

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