

Narrative Shifts

Centering Questions

Session 1 Resource Packet

SEVENTH WAVE

Session 1: Centering Questions

Overview:

This first session introduces residents to the Seventh Wave’s signature workshop model, The Mini Manifesto, which centers the writer — and two very specific questions — as a way to discuss, wield, and dissect our relationships to the heart, spine, and architecture of our individual and collective work. This session will deepen your relationship to your work by speaking directly to the way you talk about your writing. As a result, you will gain new insight into your work that could be particularly helpful for book proposals, cover letters, submissions, and applications.

Before Session:

There is nothing you *need to do* prior to our first session together. We want you to show up as you are. For yourself and for others. Especially during times of uncertainty — from everyday difficulties to the ongoing crises of today — we lean into the collective practice of art to help guide us toward ourselves and each other. Before our first session together, please read the Welcome Packet, this Resource Packet, and sit with the big picture of your writing/work. It may help to write a list of questions that your work is asking or your goals for yourself or your work for the next seven weeks.

Optional prompt: If you’re looking for a generative prompt, [consider this one](#). We’ve asked 100+ questions across our 17 calls since 2015. In this worksheet, we selected a question from each year that speaks to us these days. Feel free to reflect on one or some, write questions in response, or simply sit and see what surfaces for you. You may also go to our [magazine landing page](#) and look through our past issues. If you click on any issue, you can see the call by clicking “Editor’s Note.”

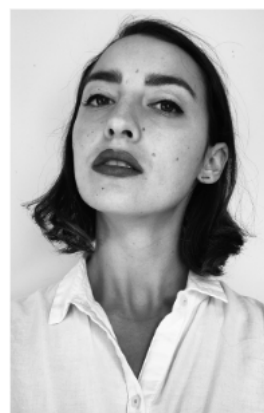
During Session:

Below are the activities we have planned for our first session:

- **Maybe u r like me.** A two-part, freewriting exercise to prompt us toward each other, inspired by body performer Saff Lynn Douglas' anonymous art project of the same name, which was a means of connecting people across borders of identification. Saff was also our [featured artist for Issue 10: Willful Innocence](#).
- **The Mini Manifesto.** As Seventh Wave's approach to "the workshop," our mini manifesto asks two questions that will help you talk about your work, receive feedback about your work, and even apply for future residencies. We will also be referencing Liz Lerman's and John Borstel's [Critical Response Process](#).

After Session:

These are continuing resources created in collaboration with Emilie Menzel, a poet and librarian who builds creative libraries for individuals, nonprofits, and organizations (pictures are not in order, but just a sample of the authors listed).



1. How To Access and Write Centering Questions:

- **[“How to Write an Artist Statement,”](#) The Creative Independent. Article.**
While writing a manifesto is not, or does not need to be, the same as writing an artist statement, the processes for the two overlap closely. This resource

provides strong guiding points for finding the pulse of your work: How do you talk about your work to friends? What emotions do you hope to evoke? What emotions do you evoke in yourself?

- [**The artist's guide: how to make a living doing what you love**](#), **Chapter 2, Jackie Battenfield. Book Chapter.** This manual on the practical sides of the artist life is no-nonsense, and sometimes that's exactly what you need when you're staring down that residency application draft. Battenfield gives you an overview and example of artist statements (see chapter 2, pg. 46-61 for instructions on artist statements), followed by detailed step-by-step instructions. The book is written for a visual artist audience, but this translates quite well to writers' artist statements, and Battenfield's perspective of describing the shape and material of the work are helpful considerations for poets and hybrid genre writers.

2. Resources to Return To:

- [**Between the Covers**](#), **Tin House. Podcast.** Long-form, highly detailed interviews with writers and their relationships to writing and the values they carry into their work. If you're looking for an episode to begin with, check out [Patrycja Humienik](#), [Bhanu Kapil](#), [Callum Angus](#), or [Kaveh Akbar](#).
- [**The Bagley Wright Lectures**](#), **Wave Books. Book series and podcast.** Open, braided essay lectures by contemporary poets on their beliefs about writing and their approaches to craft. The meandering, "walk with me" style of these talks lends itself especially well to learning more about other writers' centering questions.

3. Examples of Centering Questions:

- [**"On Keeping a Journal,"**](#) **Joan Didion. Essay.** "...our notebooks give us away, for however dutifully we record what we see around us, the common denominator of all we see is always, transparently, shamelessly, the implacable 'I.'"

- [Black Women Writers at Work](#), **Claudia Tate, editor. Book.** "Through candid interviews with Maya Angelou, Toni Cade Bambara, Gwendolyn Brooks, Alexis De Veaux, Nikki Giovanni, Kristin Hunter, Gayl Jones, Audre Lorde, Toni Morrison, Sonia Sanchez, Ntozake Shange, Alice Walker, Margaret Walker, and Sherley Anne Williams, the book highlights the practices and critical linkages between the work and lived experiences of Black women writers whose work laid the foundation for many who have come after. Responding to questions about why and for whom they write, and how they perceive their responsibility to their work, to others, and to society, the featured playwrights, poets, novelists, and essayists provide a window into the connections between their lives and their art."

4. Resources by the Seventh Wave: The below pieces published by the Seventh Wave are hybrid and process pieces that step outside the traditional realm of publication, shining a light on the different ways we create.

- ["these things now for my companions i shall sing beautifully,"](#) **beloved.** At times a call and response, at times free-flowing verse, beloved's hybrid poetry piece asks questions of queer liberation and kinship, pondering big questions like "what is it that queer folk are aspiring to, yearning for, working towards?"
- ["Process & Unprocess,"](#) **Eve Lederman.** Eve Lederman's reflective piece "Process & Unprocess" examines her creative journey in writing and then producing the script for her first play, *Nothing But the Truth*, providing insight into the roadblocks she encountered, as well as the epiphanies she had in the making of the play.
- ["Featured Artist,"](#) **Gabrielle Bates.** As the featured artist for Issue 9: What We Lose, Gabrielle Bates shared space and conversation with our four Bainbridge Residents and created a hybrid piece combining visual artwork with reflections on how artificial boundaries can constrain humanity, identity, and place.
- ["Plainclothes Agenda,"](#) **Christopher Kojzar.** Christopher Kojzar's interdisciplinary art practice often sees him creating in public spaces as a way to understand how his identity as a Black man impacts others' perceptions of him in different contexts. In "Plainclothes Agenda," Chris documents the

process behind one of his performance pieces and delves into its historical influences and implications.

- **[“An Essay on Processing.” Meg Sykes.](#)** Our Art Director Meg Sykes created the featured artwork for Issue 13: Rebellious Joy at an incredibly difficult time in her life — the sudden hospitalization and passing of her father. In this touching essay, she reflects upon how turning her mind toward joy and collective creativity helped her process her father’s life, even after death.
- **[“Rest Begets Rest: An Essay.” Bianca Ng.](#)** Bianca Ng, our 2020-2022 Artist in Residence, interviewed 16 individuals — including contributors, TSW team members, and residents — about their approaches to rest in order to create an artist postcard series; this essay shares more insight into her process.

If you have any questions about the resources provided, just let us know.

Additional Reference Material:

In Session 1, you may also hear us referencing [Liz Lerman and John Borstel’s Critical Response Process](#), which is a “method for getting useful feedback on anything you make, from dance to dessert,” and which has four core steps for engaging in thoughtful dialogue — statements of meaning, artist as questioner, neutral questions from responders, and permissioned opinions — and three roles for conversation. Our workshop method/process, which we call the Mini Manifesto, adopts parts of this process and approach to dialogue, facilitation, and conversation about art.

*Your only obligation
is to be here.*

