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Afro-Indigenous Environmental Art Education

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Afro-Indigenous Environmental Art Education

by

By IvoRi Schley of Afro Agriculture LLC

Under the Direction of Carrier Freshour, PhD

A Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree of

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ABSTRACT

Abstract: Settler colonialism, racial capitalism, and global urbanization compromise urban youth's access to welcoming urban greenspaces. How can an Afro-Indigenous approach (including a praxis of art making and folklore) to environmental education reengage urban youth? One hundred percent (100%) outdoor nature art programs can reveal urban youth's desire to connect to the past. From Sankofa to afro-futurism, we study past gems to orient the Afro's future. This thesis details Afro Agriculture LLC's Survivalnomics Workshop, which took place in summer 2024. Survivalnomics is an environmental art curriculum that challenged ten Black Atlanta, GA homeschoolers to study folklore, cordage, fiber art, wilderness first aid, cooking, and regenerative agriculture at The Hartnett Farm on top of Bush Mountain in Southwest Atlanta, Georgia. Despite urban renewal and food apartheid, these cultural life skills set a foundation for afro-futuristic resistance and preservation of Black and Indigenous ontologies, encouraging cultural identity, sustainability, and self-determination for young Afros.

INDEX WORDS: Afro-futurism, Afro-indigenous, Folklore, Environmental education,
Decolonization

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2025

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DEDICATION

I dedicate this body of work to my twin, Markeyah Latrelle Green, and future Afro American Environmental Educators. Many thanks to supportive friends and family members. I am the first member in my family to achieve a graduate degree.

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Here I want to acknowledge inspiring conversations with good friends Dr Erica Holloman-Hill and Professor Jazmin George. Gratitude for Dr Carrie Freshour, Dr Constance Bailey, my advising committee, Georgia State University's CSAW program, the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance, and the Southeastern African American Farmers Organic Network.

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1 INTRODUCTION

My Pathway to Environmental Education

I am a fully funded scholar through the NSF funded Community-Soil-Air-Water (CSAW) program in the Department of Geosciences at Georgia State University. Through CSAW, our research requires community input to make real impacts and break barriers from the ivory tower. CSAW meetings address systemic obstacles in Atlanta; we've completed undoing racism workshops together; visited landfills, toured hotspots of compromised air, water, and soil quality, practiced grant-writing, and brainstormed with local community-based organizations to envision an environmentally just Atlanta, Georgia.

As an Environmental Justice Activist, I have six years of experience in the field of urban farming and environmental education. My Bachelor's in Horticulture and Master's coursework in Geography infinitely affect how I interpret land use around me, typically through critical examinations of urban foodspaces and young people's lack of exposure to nature. I will begin my story in 2018 with my horticulture capstone project at North Carolina A&T State University. My farm site was Dudley High School, one of Greensboro, NC's last remaining historically Black high schools. Dudley had a school garden once active in the 1970s, but 50 years later, projects fell through due to unlit flames; the urgent need and desire to farm is not always realized. Often administration lacks support (physical and financial) to resurrect food needs in a food desert. Solid teamwork, funding support, and a welcoming atmosphere are all needed to maintain urban edible greenspaces. The school garden remains inactive, but other local resources like Afro Agriculture's Peaceful Seeds Farm at Peace of Prince Lutheran Church (farmed by Nallah Muhammad, cofounder of Afro Agriculture) offer hope for Greensboro foodways.

After graduating from A&T in 2019, I was an Americorps Intern for a land trust nestled in the North Carolina Appalachians, learning about trail stewardship, conservation easements, and after-school environmental education programs. Here I realized Land is wealth. The ancient old growth trails were the backyards of the summer homes belonging to an older population of Southern wealthy elites. While this mountain community revealed stark living conditions and racial profiling, white comfort was bliss at 4,000 ft elevations nestled in a small town with mountains separating grocery stores and dollar generals filling up holes in between. Outside of my horticulture lessons at the local church, library, or Boys and Girls Club, the community seemed indifferent to prioritizing food access, whether rural or urban conditions. It wasn't quite trending yet.

During the COVID-19 pandemic, I returned to my hometown in predominantly Black Clayton County, Georgia to farm and be close to family during a global crisis. In 2020, I co-founded my business Afro Agriculture LLC (Afro Ag), providing access to nature, arts, and self sufficiency for historically marginalized communities. As I reflect on life changes since 2020, mental peace, workforce development, and food sufficiency are more important than ever for food apartheid regions and remain active goals for environmental justice. I have been influenced by many local farm organizations: Truly Living Well, EcoParadigm, Polyculture Productions, and High Hog Farm. Since 2022, I have contracted farm and educational services with the West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA), a Black environmental justice non-profit organization. As co-stewards of the 22-acre old growth forest in the Historically Black Bush Mountain and Oakland City community, WAWA addresses environmental disparities in the Proctor, Utoy, and

Sandy Creek watersheds. While WAWA excels in local air, water, and soil quality research, they also offer a variety of cultural and green resources, from hyperlocal food distribution, annual camping, summer camps, and kayaking events, to guest speakers with Indigenous Nations. WAWA offers opportunities for radical afro-futurism at The Outdoor Activity Center, resting at the foothills of the public park Bush Mountain. Working with an Afrocentric environmental non-profit has supported my creative offerings while stewarding the Land.

Grounding African Cosmologies in Environmental Education

I use “Afros” as an implied metaphor in reference to the descendants of enslaved Africans who experienced chattel slavery and continue to live in America today. I am primarily addressing the relationship between Aborigines/Indigenous nations and African people before colonization of current day Americas. This includes those with multiple generations of Black grandparents on American soil. Black history exists before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. I may use “Black”¹ and “Afro-American” interchangeably, as Black people are more than a color. Our identities continue to change without our consent (ex: from Negroes, to Coloreds, to African-Americans), so here is my declaration to call us Afros respectfully. Folklore has fluidity so Afros may expand to diasporic folktales. However, this thesis is primarily about the Afro-American experience.

In reference to “nature”, I address trees, water, soil, the biotic and abiotic, natural resources and physical landforms that serve as backgrounds and subjects for human stories. Nature is an alive, moving spirit with or without human interactions. I capitalize Land and Nature, borrowing from

¹ Black, African-American, and Afros in this context refers to African descendants of American chattel slavery. I am aware Afros are found globally and the term is used beyond my current definition.

African cosmologies that acknowledge the webs of interconnectivity across spirit, nature, and humanity (Harris 2017).

Feminist and Professor Melanie Harris examines race, religion, gender, and environmental ethics, writing, “Ancestors are believed to reside in many aspects of nature, so any human behavior that diminishes or dishonors nature can have a devastating impact on the relationship between the human and the ancestor” (Harris 2017). Regardless of gender, size, or economic status, to disrespect the ant and tree is to disrespect your ancestors. This ethical mandate to care for the earth is a normative standard for many African and Indigenous cultures. Tiffany Lethabo King’s writing on Black and Indigenous cosmologies shows us how the plants, stars, moon, fungi, and animals are our relatives too (King, 2020). The unique latitude and longitude coordinates directly affect the unique sentiments of the local culture. Slopes and streams get political when human access is involved.

Across America’s urban food apartheid regions, how can we convince people to care— not just about healthy food, but a healthy environment as well? Through my extensive work and experience as an environmental educator, fiber artist, and horticulturist, I believe that placemaking strengthens relations with the land. People need a sense of belonging, exposure, and representation to care about anything. Place-based encounters add meaning and memories for people. Growing and sharing food is an ancient trade. We need more home economics! These thoughts fuel my purpose to create an environmental art curriculum for urban youth.

The abundance and importance of food is overlooked because it is considered a basic need and an everyday phenomenon. Yet, the world has seen wars over salt, oil, and water, and American supermarkets are limited to one variety per produce (Standage, 2010). Why is healthy food perceived as boring or unaffordable? Talking about healthy food is a loaded question that teeters towards energy burdens. Is one's electricity, housing, and water bills secured first? Land politics create hurdles for urban farmers to access land, but abundant harvests challenge the mainstream scarcity mentality. For small-scale independent farmers, accessing funds can be tricky as young entrepreneurs venture through grants and business plans.

This research is a reflection of over 6 years of land stewardship. In this thesis, I have created a nature art curriculum for Atlanta's Black homeschool youth. Locally sourced cordage, natural dyes, weaving, outdoor cooking, and first aid cover some basic necessities to sustain one's home. This research seeks to explore how Afros can return to nature in food apartheid settings. I did not make a new discovery. I simply borrowed and shared Afro-Indigenous ancestral hobbies relevant to my region, here in the US Southeast. Afro-American folklore offers richness that Roblox² cannot. If we slow down and put away our technology, we still desire to connect to our past. I sowed mental seeds to ground urban youth with cultural and functional art. Accompanied by Atlanta Black homeschool students, together we practiced decolonizing by sharing oral stories of our ancestors' past, manipulating nature without exhaustion, uplifting the local Muscogee Creek Indigenous Nation, and taking up space at Hartnett Farm and the greater Bush Mountain. Max Liboiron's (2021) scholarship tracing anticolonial research practices and learning from Indigenous decolonization efforts informs my own attempts at decolonizing research by undoing colonial and capitalist relations to land. By investing in youth's interests to learn cultural life

² This is a popular online game created in 2006 that allows users to create a virtual world.

skills, I made environmental art with homeschool youth who I have come to understand as the modern maroons.

Homeschooling, Marronage, and Afro-futurism

Active supporters of critical thinking and global knowledge, some Black homeschool parents have grown weary of lackluster teaching standards and systemic racism in the education system, which explains why Black homeschool families rose nationwide since 2020 from 3% to 16.1%, according to the US Census Bureau (Guardian 2023, the Atlanta voice 2022, Census, 2021).³ The school to prison pipeline, No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, over medication of ADHD Black youth, anti-Blackness and educational tracking, racially biased testing, redlines and property tax displacement, over-policing of Black students, and more, exude the urgency for homeschooling as an alternative education route especially during the global pause of the Covid-19 pandemic (Klein, 2015). Although it is a privilege for those who can provide their children homeschooling, it is also a necessary (and ancient) approach to raise Black children. The thesis establishes an Afro Ag curriculum applicable to workshops, after-school programs, and more for home school educators. Generally, everyone can attain this knowledge. However, urban youth are the most ignored. This content is for Afro educators teaching Afro youth. Representation and exposure are critical, so urban youth need to take up space first.

I present Black homeschooling as an otherwise landscape; it forms modern marronage by choosing an alternative lifestyle that does not appease colonial standards. Homeschooling as marronage is reclaiming our destiny, defying the status quo house with the picket fence.

³ It is difficult to disaggregate this growth entirely from the impacts of COVID-19 and the George Floyd Rebellions of 2020, but both reflect systemic racism on a national scale in terms of response, premature death, and public outcry (Freshour and Williams 2020).

Connecting marronage and folklore, Celeste Winston (2023) explains how “maroon folklore is a technology of escape that emerged during slavery to convey vital knowledge about routes to freedom.” Make what you need with what you have! Maroons would smear dung or onions on their clothes and bodies to throw off their scent and to escape the hounds (Winston 2023).

Marronage is bold freedom and escape.

Remember the Black runner! The settler’s law calls the runaway a criminal for stealing themselves away from enslavers to claim their autonomous freedom. I will address folklore in greater detail in the following chapters. Here, please note folklore remains incomplete and unsettled as folklore is often perceived as a combination of myth, rumor, and story. (Winston, 2023). Black flight folklore illuminates how fugitivity can be a strategy of placemaking that offers refuge from the racially violent system of slavery and its afterlives.

Whether in the Dismal Swamp of Virginia/North Carolina, the Abercorn Bear Creek Maroons in Savannah, Georgia, the Florida Seminoles, or the bayou maroons in Louisiana, Africans, Indigenous Nations, and poor Whites were all dwellers of maroon wetlands. For New Orleans swamp maroon communities, the Chitimacha (those living on the river) tribe, among others, shared skills like willow and river cane basket weaving, pottery, blowing mortar and pestle, build or trade tools, and building palmetto and cypress timber shelters (Allen, 2022). Marronage practices also involved opening channels for small boats, sustainable foraging, growing food, knowing tidal patterns, observing plant growth and animal patterns to gauge times to relocate (ibid). Wetlands offer biofiltration for freshwater to drink and cook. Read the stars and build small boats. Maroons created a safe space co-existing with intense heat, mud, alligators, snakes,

and mosquitoes. Newly arrived enslaved Africans who chose marronage were forced to quickly learn edible and medicinal plants along with local animals. Their landscape was “two worlds at once; neither solid nor submerged, hidden, yet never completely safe.” The Middle Passage transported African beliefs carrying the power of nature for healing and protection, and the importance of living in moral, spiritual, and physical harmony with natural systems (ibid). Maroons were naturalists! While plantation slavery damaged landscapes, maroon communities offered potential ecologically inventive approaches supporting land care and fostering human/nonhuman connections across landscape types (Allen, 2022). Billie Holiday told us strange fruit hangs from poplar trees (1939). Rotting Black bodies contaminated Nature (Wright, 2021). But Nature was a witness at the crime scene, not the criminal (Penniman and Washington, 2018). afro-futurism empowers us to change the narrative and heal a traumatized community’s relationship with Nature.

Homeschooling is a form of modern marronage because it defies traditional American education standards. Parents pass down valuable community and cultural knowledge. Malcolm X (1966) said only a fool would let his enemy teach his children. Through Survivalnomics, I encourage similar escape from indoctrination and strategy for the future. I hypothesize that art creation with fibers, cordage, natural dyes, and wilderness skills will build critical thinking, problem solving, and confidence for urban youth. Students will define their own narratives and make strides towards self-determination and afro-futurism as they bond with nature. This knowledge is available for youth from all backgrounds, but in this study it is necessary for Black youth to learn their history first.

What do I mean by afro-futurism? afro-futurism refers to Afros radically imagining being present and thriving in a distant future (Womack, 2013). Willie Jamal Wright (2021) argues that Afros have endured an apocalypse since slavery, causing massive displacement, dispossession, and disconnection to land and culture. Epigenetics shows us that on a cellular level, descendants of enslaved Africans store sorrow, fear, burnout, hope, faith, creativity, and other elements of survival tactics from living in the United States (Leary, 2005). It's bold to imagine a future with you in it when the future looks bleak. Quick visualizations of afro-futurism within popular culture are Missy Elliot and Sun Ra; they are refreshing, alluring, loud and authentic. These entertainers set the standards for future art.

There is also rest in the Afro's future. In *Rest is Resistance*, author Tricia Hersey (2022) assures us we cannot feel guilty to rest. From chattel slavery, we are taught to work until exhaustion for capitalism, but we are greater than the lazy Sambo stereotypes. Life is more than the hustle culture, "I'll sleep when I'm dead" mentality. Rest refuels the body and soul, allowing new spaces for creativity and imagination. If we are physically limited to this reality, why not imagine something better? Rest is required to manifest dreams into reality.

In this thesis I ask:

1. How does uplifting Afro-Indigenous knowledge inspire environmental stewardship in Atlanta's urban youth?
2. How can students define their own narratives as they explore self-determination and afro-futurism within environmental education?

3. How do nature-based crafts and life skills shape how youth learn about the environment (as tied to history, race, gender, and culture)?
4. How can an Afro-Indigenous approach to environmental education reengage urban youth?

I aim for youth to gain awareness of their positions in society after learning cultural folklore and crafts. Relevant and meaningful curriculum may encourage interests in the environment for urban youth. I offer a workshop-based curriculum that uplifts Afro-American Folklore and hyperlocal Indigenous crafts to inspire environmental reverence and afro-futurism for urban youth. Inspired by Tiffany King, I concur that Afros and Natives share more similarities than differences against settler colonialism. Here I propose the following arguments; 1) Westernized urbanization is a global trend that hinders urban youths' connections with nature, 2) Urban youth are among the most disadvantaged in cities, and 3) Despite the effects of settler colonialism, Black and Indigenous ecologies can activate an alternative approach for environmental reverence and self-determination for urban youth geographies.

2 LITERATURE REVIEW

Cultural Effects of Global Urbanization

Westernized urbanization is a global trend, as families leave rural areas behind for built conveniences or displacement. Since 2007, people have globally shifted to primarily urban dwelling instead of rural (Our World in Data, 2024). Due to the limited walkability of greenspaces in some neighborhoods, parents may restrict youth's interactions with nature more than previous generations. (Duhn et al, 2017). While a plethora of clothing retailers, movie theaters, skyscrapers, banks, housing, food, and entertainment galore exist, urban youth are the most disadvantaged because access to nature is not prioritized.

Youth from less developed nations or disadvantaged cities in wealthy nations are virtually invisible. Busy highways and degraded landscapes can invoke feelings of fear and uneasiness. Urban youth face serious danger of pollutants and pathogens in local air, water, soil, and food (Duhn et al, 2017). As urbanization increases, animal species and Indigenous cultures are being erased and pressured with further assimilation. Americans are taught, by schools and public broadcasting, that man is above nature and earthly resources are for the taking. Dominant propaganda asserts that humans are not nature, we currently live unnatural/distant from nature, and we primarily live superior to/dominant over nature (Phillips, 2008; Smith, 1984).

In 1970, Nathan Hare explained how urban dwellers and urban environments are often perceived as pollution and disposable. Low-income urban neighborhoods are deemed fit for pollution (it has to go somewhere, right?). Let McKittrick (2006, 2011) tell us, and she'll address how Historically Black spaces are figuratively and literally equated with Otherness, those without, the

surplus, the savage, and the demonic, only fit to live in uninhabitable places. But, the demonic is the alternative spaces of potential, of freedom, of escape. Traditional environmental education focuses on biology and ecology, ignoring oppressed groups historically denied access to parks, beaches, and forests. Settler anxiety and coercion enforces dispossession, displacement, and a global loss of reciprocal land relations for marginalized folks (Harris, 2017).

Noting the rise of global urbanization, Mike Davis (2007) anticipates an imminent apocalypse in our global economy. Capitalism depends on exploitation, leaving the marginalized concentrated in urban peripheries limited to precarious living conditions, segregation, and police violence, while a growing urban elite live, work, and play behind increasingly gated communities.

Capitalism is on the verge of crumbling due to the overreliance and exploitation of the working class (Davis, 2007). The undesired, overlooked Others dwell in suburbs, slums, tent villages, housing project rentals, etc. These dynamics are not limited to global South megacities like Mumbai, Nairobi, and Rio de Janeiro, but also play out here in Atlanta separating residents from basic needs, much less a connection to environmental education and placekeeping practices.

Afros Navigating Outdoors and Environmental Terrorists

In 2006, Carolyn Finney provided a framework of Black experiences in unwelcoming greenspaces. The National Park System (NPS) historically leads the American wilderness narrative by completely erasing the Indigenous presence in America. NPS recalls national forests as untouched, clean, and pristine. Meanwhile, Black people are stricken with memories of lynchings and forced labor. The strange fruit on poplar trees eventually rotted and “contaminated” nature, but the story of Black spaces extends beyond that epoch (Wright, 2021). We are artistic

and creative inventors of popular culture, farm tools, and further essentials (Penniman and Washington, 2018).

Environmentalism is tied to history, race, gender, and culture. Historically, Blacks risked violent encounters going outside; parks, forests, beaches, pools, etc. were reserved for white settlers to enjoy (Williams, 2021). The psychological aftermath affects generations today. Teona Williams portrays a bleak reality of anti-Blackness undergirding the politics of access to urban greenspace. Afro-Americans are killed senselessly by police on a regular basis. In this instance, in 2012 22-year-old Rekia Boyd was shot and killed at Hyde Park, located in between University of Chicago and Chicago's "Urban" South Side. In Rekia's case, the urban greenspace was racially profiled, and a police force was activated for urban serenity. Urban renewal comes with gentrification and policing, emphasizing crime narratives in Black spaces, coupled with displacing public housing residents and Black-owned businesses.

Damien Sojoyner eloquently summarized the current experiences of urban working class America. *Joy and Pain* (2022) is a reflection of his community organizing efforts with the historic Southern California Library in Los Angeles, California. He learns from Marley, a respected community organizer, blood member, houseless, and formerly incarcerated young Black man. Marley points out ironies of the American system and stresses how inadequate basic needs impact people affected by poverty. American Section 8 Housing has evolved to be aesthetically pleasing (at least in Atlanta), so Americans shouldn't complain about first world problems, but when you're faced with consistent adversity due to underfunded and under-resourced education, food, housing, healthcare, and employment, even the United States

can feel very familiar to third world poverty of the Global South (Hare, 1970). Marley declared White Supremacy as America's largest public health concern. He noticed how increased policing creates unsafe environments and contemplated how basic needs could be met in alternative community-owned spaces, instead of reserving parcels for the few wealthy elites.

Marley represents the voice of the "troubled" urban youth with limited resources. Some youth become susceptible to the spiderweb connections of housing, food, schools, and prisons. These days, there's the Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) Test that tallies childhood traumas with the hypothesis that the rougher the childhood, the more risks for health problems in adulthood (Starecheski, 2015). Quality of life affects what you eat at home and in your neighborhood. Health-conscious folks avoid overly processed sugars, salts, and fats, but life happens in this temptation for American convenience.

Since the late 1980s, schools have become identified as spaces of racial containment (Sojoyner, 2017 and 2022). Schools--especially public free and reduced lunch ones-- offer guaranteed meals twice a day. If the teachers are not revolutionary, then schools are just spaces of harsh sentencing, conforming to standard doctination, and getting trained to work. If you "fail" or cheat in society, the carceral system, or school detention, eagerly waits for you. Having an incarcerated family member can traumatize anyone, but especially youth development as it drastically disrupts the flow of the household. Hopefully therapy is available to manage stress at home, but either way, push through and try to learn something at school. The cycle continues.

Williams (2021), Finney (2014), and Sojoyner (2022) all addressed social environmental injustices where marginalized groups are expected to be content with subpar nature connections. Colonizers have priority for land access at everyone else's discomfort, whether folks are subject to surveillance, gates, or police violence. Marley's first real experience in nature was at a juvenile jail camp in the mountains. It's absolutely shocking to smell air not contaminated by city smog, to hear a real woodpecker, and to be immersed in pine trees. Do urban environments offer outreach for environmental exposure before jail circumstances? It's ironic how incarceration can provide space and freedom to think more than in the supposed comfort of one's home (Sojoyner, 2022). Black joy is policed often. In both slavery and prison, people are dehumanized as families are separated, people are given life sentences, and youth are tried as adults, for containment or as vessels for labor. The timeline of colonization disrupts friendly encounters with Land, our kin.

In *Black Food Geographies* (2019), Reese reveals that although food apartheid communities persist nationwide, we share similar struggles. When food resources are primarily a corner store, the community may blame their own people for the lack, overlooking the systemic root issues that cause deficient foodways. Before the boom of Cold War industrial agriculture, people would bake at home and share with the neighborhood. Licensing stopped all of that, people need permits now to sell food and it's considered poor to forage from the land (Reese 2019, Purifoy 2024, Black Forager 2024). Modern people use refrigerators. Limited income affects exposure and accessibility to resources. Life gets tricky keeping up with the Joneses.

Anger from the marginalized is quickly escalated to terrorist threats. Who determines who is the terrorist?! Whether Los Angeles or Atlanta, the disparities mirror each other from coast to coast. The Los Angeles Police Department (LAPD) created spy programs in the 80s around the 1984

Olympics. During an assortment of racial discrimination lawsuits, the LAPD deleted more than two million surveillance files to diminish access to public records. They admitted to studying at least 170 Black organizations in LA, ranging from Islamic mosques to the Black Panther Party. The spy department was saved under the premise of preparing LA for the 1984 Olympics to fight against international (or domestic) terrorism; this model has been adopted nationwide to legally suppress Black freedom (Sojoyner, 2022). In reflection, the 1996 Atlanta Olympics mimicked strategies from LA, as heavy surveillance was coupled with low-income evictions and demolitions to support Atlanta's anti-terrorist initiative.

Today, The Atlanta Police Foundation practices deforestation to build an 85-acre police training playground (aka Cop City) on the South River (aka Welanee Forest) near Black working class Decatur neighborhoods to invade residences and public community spaces more efficiently. Manuel Esteban Perez Teran (aka Tortuguita) was a Venezuelan Environmental Justice activist who was killed by at least 57 gunshot wounds from Georgia State Troopers at a Stop Cop City protest on January 18, 2023. Troopers were not charged for the manslaughter against an "environmental terrorist" (cbs news 2023; apnews 2023). Atlanta, Georgia leads the nation as the highest surveilled city in America with the development of Cop City as city officials prepare for the 2026 World Cup and beyond. Urbanization prioritizes urban renewal and limits resources for the Others. "Terrorists" remains a popular buzzword to force control and violence upon radical resisters of colonization.

Afros are preferably pipelined to prisons, guilt-tripped into "relaxing when we're dead", and pushed to the margins of society to preserve space for the dominant white culture (Hersey,

2022). Anti-Blackness is a vector of racial capitalism, helping us understand why prisons are disproportionately filled with Black men and why police feel like the terrorists in my neighborhood (Alexander, 2010; Cornum, 2021). Considering my position as a Black womb-man farming in the historic Southwest Atlanta, healthy food is limited and land is mighty challenging to own for various systemic and historic reasons. I do believe anti-Blackness exists in racial capitalism. In a recent interview with the author of *AfroPessimism* (2020) and *Incognegro* (2015), Dr Frank Wilderson informs us there's a global anxiety about Blackness solidarity (iMWil!, 2021). Influencing AfroPessimism is Orlando Patterson's (2018) argument that economic identity relies on the social death of Black bodies. Once we are stripped from culture, language, and land, we become a wild card, a fungible token accessible for any country's arcade room (The Conscious Lee, 2023; King 2019). Can Whites maintain a content lifestyle if the detriment of Black folks is removed? I'm not sure.

But I am sure that Afros enjoy nature too. Reese and Johnson (2022) lists our outdoor customs to memorialize ancestry, remember the past, eat well, celebrate special occasions, smell BBQs, enjoy heavy bass on custom stereos, support pop-up vendors, and more. Generally, these activities are in opposition with the quiet European interpretations of enjoying nature. These opposing experiences invite police force for status quo reinforcement. Urban youth must take caution in such environments.

Settler Colonialism and Decolonization

Settler Colonialism is a global phenomena. Kyle Whyte (2018), an enrolled member of the Potawatomi Nation, explains how humans have a responsibility to care for nature, and vice versa. For example, just as water supports life (plants, people, birds, etc), life supports water via

earth, rain, and fish. Nonhumans have their own agency, spirituality, knowledge, and intelligence regarding their way of understanding this world. This demands mutual respect! Through a focus on the ecological practices of the Karuk and Anishnaabe, Whyte develops the concept of collective continuance. Collective continuance pertains to Indigenous people's strategies to adapt to ecosystems without harming them. Settler colonialism displaces and disrupts practices of reciprocal respect, enforcing that the settler agenda precedes everything else. Insidious loops mean old ways return, in regards to capitalist views disrupting sacred land centuries ago as well as just weeks ago. Lacking a desire to honor sacred land, settler colonialism deliberately removes any sense of belonging for people of color on a frequent basis (Whyte, 2018).

Unfortunately, insidious loops of settler colonialism are abundant. Swampification (Vickers, 2022) is a tale of displacing and assimilating legacy maroon communities in the Great Dismal Swamp on the North Carolina/Virginia border. During the New Deal, a profitable opportunity developed on remote land inhabited by an autonomous Black community in South Carolina. Through the Santee-Cooper Hydroelectric and Navigation Project land finally became "properly utilized" as it became privatized, and the natural ecosystem ruined. This state-led project shows how settler colonialism continues through an insidious loop of development and dispossession.

Settler colonialism daily disrupts collective continuance. Another insidious loop involves the dispossessed Indigenous land rights in South Dakota. Again, an "underutilized" space becomes the perfect spot for oil pipelines. Anyone who protests against this action is labeled "environmental terrorists" (Bosworth and Chua, et al. 2021). When Jimmy Carter added solar panels on the White House, Ronald Reagan removed them and pledged his allegiance to the

fossil fuel industry, namely oil and coal (Sojoyner, 2022). After a series of hybrid and electric cars, we see a resurgence today with the Trump administration's allegiance to coal. Insidious loops forgive private companies who dump toxic chemicals in public drinking water, but regular people who speak up about damaged land on the colonizer's dime are liable for arrest or worse. Citizens are encouraged to avoid inconveniencing the dominant settler narrative. In the case of Hurricane Katrina in 2005, New Orleanians had crippling healthcare, jobs, housing, education, and nutritional food opportunities before the hurricane even started! Immediately following Katrina, people are given minimum 10 year felonies for petty theft. Policing and policies blame the residents for their circumstance, welcoming opportunities for urban revitalization and gentrification (Woods, 2009).

In *Carbon Sovereignty*, Andrew Curley (2023) reveals an evolution of settler colonialism. The Navajo chose the better of two bad options forced upon them, clinging on to sovereignty even if it kills them through the continued reliance on coal mining. Everyone knows carbon mining is dangerous to one's health, but it provided an annual \$30-50 million budget for the Navajo Nation. Living close to work, maintaining land relations, and providing for family are high priorities for Navajo culture. In the 1960s, coal was a promising resource, but 50 years later, the fossil fuel admittedly causes great environmental damage as a greenhouse gas, resulting in significantly reducing the budget of Navajo coal mining by 2019. It's going to take decades for flora to return to that coal site. Chemical plants and other air pollutants continue to neighbor communities of color, regardless of wealth (Sojoyner, 2022). The happiness of the marginalized in natural environments is not protected or prioritized. Unsettling anxiety for colonial violence remains a forethought.

Only recently has it been acknowledged that Indigenous people are viewed as Guardians of the Earth for their sustainable behaviors (Janisse et al, 2021). They are historically overlooked and marginalized; thus, uplifting Indigenous ontologies decolonizes settler colonialism. Decolonization in its raw form is unsettling for some, as this manifestation means settlers become landless and land is repatriated to the Indigenous. Decolonization is often appropriated to ease settler guilt, yet as Tuck and Yang (2012) remind us, “decolonization is not a metaphor”. American mainstream beliefs encourage historical amnesia. It is not uncommon to hear a settler express that Native Americans have died out or assimilated by now, so “we’re” all colonized now. These settlers run to innocence to relieve guilt for white supremacy, offering “fake woke” declarations, shallow recognitions, or ancestral ties to Pocahontas (Tuck and Yang, 2012; Dane Calloway, 2017; Simpson, 2017).

Decolonization is not a metaphor. Some settlers claim native tropes, adopting Indigenous views as an attempt to move towards innocence, relieving feelings of white guilt without acknowledging or rectifying justice for the plight of the Indigenous. Westernized urbanization is a dominant actualization of settler futurity (Barry and Agyeman, 2020). As a result, the world continues to urbanize overlaying working class exploitation and maintenance of the wealth gap atop of the ongoingness of native dispossession. People continue to migrate densely in cyborg urban environments (Swyngedouw, 1996). Self-sufficiency, sovereignty, and reclaiming identity are abominable actions for settler futurity; therefore, actions around reclaiming and repatriating land create noble acts of decolonization (Tuck and Yang, 2012).

Mapping Settler-Native-Slave and Ecowomanism's Magic

In this American context, I am addressing the relationship between Aborigines/Indigenous nations and African people before colonization of current day Americas. Black history exists before the Trans-Atlantic Slave Trade. Skillful boatmen existed in Africa and they traveled everywhere. There are cultural artifacts in West African countries that mirror artifacts in Brazil and the Southern United States (Van Sertima, 2003). The Olmec tribe is represented as massive African sculptures in Mexico B.C. Christopher Columbus noticed dark-skinned tribes when first entering the Americas (Columbus and Cohen, 1992). I would be amiss if I lumped the Afro and Native as one identity. We have a variety of lived experiences, far from a monolith. We challenge racial politics, fight against genocide and assimilation, and environmental injustices. We are more than Five Civilized Tribes. At minimum, from the 15th century to the 19th century, Africans and Indigenous people of Turtle Island were in communion with each other, side by side in chattel slavery, sometimes owning slaves themselves, and side by side in maroon communities, despite violent geographies (King, 2019).

In *Otherwise Worlds*, King et al. (2020) lay it all on the table: Afros and Natives shared the same legal status, both were recognized as slaves or “coloreds.” Natives were encouraged to disappear; disappear into Blackness or pass into whiteness. Sometimes Blacks and Natives were at odds, participating in another’s oppression as a means of survival or even self-interest. This harm is directly related to our mutual oppression (Starks, n.d.). Pre-1900, 30,000 Indigenous youth (about 10% of population) were forced to attend boarding schools, subject to severing Indigenous connections. Boy’s long hair (symbolic of pride in tribal identities) was cut short, youth were beaten for speaking their native tongue, they were forced to perform dangerous

industrial work, and sexual assault was rampant (UCSC, n.d.). In an effort to “civilize” Natives, colonizers would use the premise of religion and education to shame Indigenous ways. There are thousands of Native children in both the United States and Canada who never returned from boarding and residential schools (ibid). Temporary sovereignty is deferred genocide, which is always better than immediate genocide, right?

Federal recognition of being “Indian” is one of the biggest lies of racial supremacy (King et al 2020, National Park Service, n.d.). As Natives disappear into Blackness, the Black phenotype is denied native identity by the federal government. Legislation from the Dawes Act of 1887, 1898, and Civilized Tribe Bills in 1898 and 1914 are responsible for the current day European hijacking of Indian country (King et al., 2020). Settlers have blatantly claimed native identity with the 1924 Racial Integrity Act as well (Tuck and Yang, 2012). The Pocahontas Expedition reveals many white settlers claim maternal ancestry to Pocahontas, taking maximum advantage of the narrative of blood lineage (National Park Service, n.d.). During a PBS Interview, Sally Latimer of the Monacan Nation expressed that Natives are the only groups of people that have to prove who we are (ibid). Why is that? In the 1920s, European settlers paid \$5 so their family could claim indigenous ancestry, gaining government benefits while the real indigenous were labeled “colored” and later “Black.” Many \$5 Indians remain today (Dane Calloway, 2017). The US Census historically has social and political values that cause gaps in data as labels are placed upon people of various backgrounds (Margaret, 2004). Census employees would visit homes and label residents instead of documenting the residents’ self-acclaimed identities. A Black person can be ½ Choctaw and denied native ancestry, while a White person can claim 1/8,192 Cherokee and receive benefits with their certificate degree of Indian blood (CDIB). Whites will claim a

culture, but beyond paperwork, does the culture claim them back? Since the 1970s and 80s, Indian country has gotten whiter, with minimal ancestry claiming all the legal protection and sovereignty, while original Indigenous nations are punished and ostracized if they speak up on the hijacking (King et al., 2020).

From a geopolitical standpoint, “Indian territory” was understood as “enemy territory” so throughout the 19th and early 20th centuries, it was particularly dangerous to be an “Indian.” The journey of settler colonialism in the United States reveals the Trail of Tears, some 15,000 person genocide and The Civil War with about 650,000 casualties (britannica; Historynet). These explosively violent geographies displace and disrupt social and cultural relationships with Land for the pursuit of imperialism. King (2019) poetically correlates shoals--water/land impasses that cause disruption, slow down, and recalibration for boats--to the dynamics of Native and Black trauma, genocide and slavery, they have no edges. The US is permanently haunted by slavery, genocide, and violence; haunted because there is a refusal to stop. Whites hold an anxious desire to tame the Black and Indigenous savage. There’s a management of “disposable” people while holding on to innocent savior behaviors. The disposables are viewed as a nuisance or managed to perform specific tasks. European Settlers called Blacks lazy, but made them slaves. Called them dirty, but made them maids. Called them savages, but made them nannies (Hartman 2016).

Maps hold lots of power, as they can unmark and unmake a place. In the symbolic economy, maps can ignore human activity. Maps make visible pathways with invisible people. Waterways carried messages across villages. Pictures of slaves processing indigo, rice, and cotton were 18th century visual map anchors. Indigenous people were erased from social geography so Europeans

can present themselves as humane discoverers. The slave metaphor represents an empty vessel vulnerable to settler desires. Map illustrations of slave activity were extremely popular as they convey surveillance and capture of the exotic, the savage is conquered! There is domination over the body and terrain, although it's not fully tamed. The management of the savage into a slave is celebrated on decorative margins. Historically, Whites continuously reimagine and reinvent new ways to capture labor (King, 2019). In return, the "savage" applies creative methods to pimp the system using the herbs and rocks from the Land. Oppressed groups tend to have a unique relationship to nonhuman worlds. Thanks to kinship with Nature, Afro-Indigenous people know the Land. We were kidnapped for our skilled labor after all and later stigmatized for our talents. Despite atrocities, we manage to befriend our elemental cousins. We talk to roots and become grounded. Survive and thrive in less than desirable conditions.

The slave ship and plantation laid the foundation for the prison industrial complex, which confirms America's ranking as #1 in human trafficking (Tuck and Yang, 2012 and McKittrick, 2011). Chattel slavery calls for subjects to be landless property. Excess production requires excess labor. There cannot be pay for labor because the settler owns all the land, and Land equals Wealth. The Racial Integrity Act, sterilization, eugenics programs are all initiatives to control undesired populations. Foraging used to be the norm before racism and urbanization separated humans from nature. Environmental laws were disguised to capture labor (Purifoy, 2024 and Reese, 2019). Anti-forage laws mean people become criminals for trespassing to collect from fruit trees, but most people are landless so everyone is a criminal (ibid). Over time, foraging became equated with poverty. Keep up with the Joneses and get a refrigerator, and as a result

Americans are deeply disconnected to wild edibles (Black Forager, 2024). It's illegal to forage on someone else's property, it's illegal to play in the forest.

Robin Kelly (2017) describes the dynamic roles of “settler-native-slave”. Settlers aim to manage “surplus” populations. Some impose the narrative that Africans lost their indigeneity during the Trans-Atlantic Slave trade when they transitioned to Black Americans. This attempts to sever all Indigenous and land connections, erasing culture, identity, and consciousness. There are casual, daily occurrences where systemic efforts erase material and metaphysical relations to land, culture, and spirit, inserting new relations with ghettoization, slums, and essential labor. Today, Black and Brown people are the backbone of urban labor--essential workers as healthcare, transportation, education, municipal utilities etc. Original relations to land, culture, and spirit are not entirely erased. Afros are still Indigenous. However, the native subjugation to colonialism, dispossession, enslavement, and further exploitation continues.

In As Long As Grass Grows, Dina Gilio-Whitaker (2019) explores an Indigenous American perspective on environmental justice from Trails of Tears of the 1830s all the way to the Dakota Pipeline in 2017. The National Park Service guards Indigenous lands. To have “new, pristine wilderness” requires actively erasing a culture's existence. Indigenous Americans are more than silver, moccasins, dreamcatchers, and turquoise. When standing in solidarity at Standing Rock in the Dakotas, some supporters were unwilling to adapt to Native traditions. They refuse to wear native skirts and stay sober, treating this event like a musical festival instead of an environmental catastrophe for Indigenous Nations. EPA will not protect Native interests that contradicts the

American white settler existence. How can we reach a compromise? As long as grass grows, the fight continues.

In 2017, when a Christopher Columbus statue was defaced in New York City, Black and Natives connected through art, not just speech (King, 2019). Defacing the conquistador is always a shared resonance between the Afro and Native. The modern world owes its existence to slavery. Why is Black Death more predictable than surprising? We are surrounded by rape culture and anti-Blackness, so the race for the bottom of the racial hierarchy is irrelevant. Boarding schools “killed the Indian and saved the man” (Kliwer et al, n.d.), similar to how chattel slavery killed the African and saved the body. Although there were, and still are, colonizer efforts to traumatize and sever connections to Spirit, all is not lost. Tiffany King (2019, 2020) reminds us to recognize “it’s fucked up for you [Native Americans] the same way that it’s fucked up for us [Afros]”.

Ecowomanism unashamedly acknowledges the Spirit (Harris 2017, p.26). Casas (2022) informs us that Spirit cannot tell the difference between a person or a plant because they are both living beings! Middle Passage carries African religions and spiritual values. From enslavement to Jim Crow to the prison industrial complex, Afro-Americans may have practiced Hoodoo, Afro-American folk magic, as an act of resistance against having their families separated, getting whipped, lynched, raped, being landless, and bracing themselves for the harsh court system. Hoodoo, unlike Voodoo, is divorced from religion so ethical codes are not a factor (Janisse et al, 2021). Hoodoo, originating in the US South by Afro-Americans, is a blend of European, Indigenous, and African spiritual practices and folk traditions, manipulating household and local items to prevail despite adversity. Afros adapt, making something shake with what they have.

Although every culture has their own folklore and related spiritual practices, Afro and Indigenous spirituality is commercialized and gentrified now; northern settlers made substantial revenue exploiting other cultures and making magic products more accessible for migrants since the Great Migration (Hazzard-Donald, 2012).

This thesis is not a flat generalization about Black and Indigenous struggles being the same (King, 2019). These distinct cultural identities share similar ontologies due to living in close proximity to each other while shaping the framework of early colonization in the Americas (Starks, n.d.). Although Afros and Indigenous folk have distinct timelines, their historical cooperation can make the distinction appear vague. Cultural exchanges reveal a common reverence for land, practice of environmental stewardship, and reciprocal responsibility of land ethics despite involuntary displacement of the land (Roane, 2022). Scholarship in Black Ecologies shows us how Black life is shaped by ongoing violence and vulnerability, but also innovation, improvisation, and choreographies of survival. Contemporary Black political ecologists advise to deny the permanence of settler colonialism with dreams and fantasy of life before invasion; to envision a decolonial future, radical spatial imagination is required. (Reese and Johnson, 2022; Williams, 2021; Kelly, 2017)

Afro and Indigenous histories overlap more than the public school indoctrination cares to acknowledge. Indigenous ontologies assert that true self can only be found in contact with nature (Duhn et al 2017, Nesterova 2020). We cannot fully be tamed because maroon communities represent otherwise landscapes, alternative spaces for intellectual thought, creativity, and escape. We are more alike than we are different. Environmental Justice requires us to organize the

community to create social visions, guidelines for a metaphysical roadmap. We manage to pull joy out of depths of pain. The struggle continues. (King et al., 2020 and Sojoyner, 2022).

Mapping Environmental Education Across Atlanta

Despite school dropout rates, underfunded schools, and a lack of resources, anyone can gain access to informal EE information, similar to folklore. The existence of these programs are great; however, are they culturally mindful or do they produce racist tropes and violent stereotypes?

Let me help you imagine walking through a savanna landscape in what is now Africa, and meeting one of these educators a long time ago. [I don a mask of an early human. See *Figure 1*.]



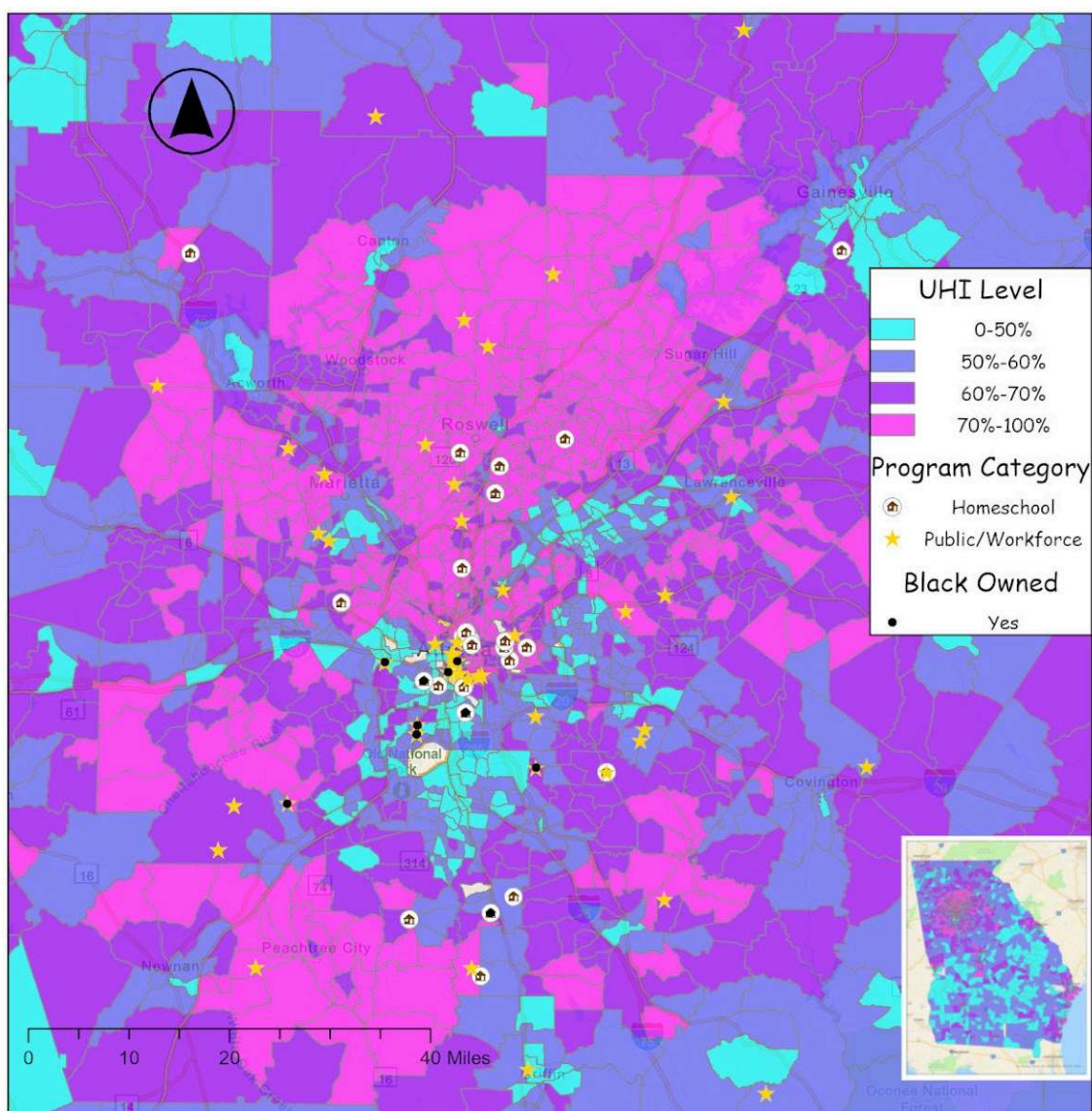
Figure 1. Mask and outfit

Figure 1. MacEachren's "Early Outdoor Educator" costume

MacEachren (2019) provided a colorful history of ancient crafts--fiber art, knitting, flint-knapping, and needle work--we still use today. While describing Indigenous activities, MacEachren offered a silly Adam and Eve/Monkey suit to help the audience imagine an Early Human. She shared the classic colonial Adam and Eve Bible narrative to portray pre-colonial Indigeneity. Her Colonizer suit is a performative misrepresentation of Original People (See Figure 1). This may appear as innocuous entertainment, but as a spiritual Afro-American steward of the land, this does not resonate well. MacEachren is a thorough storyteller with a colorful background in Folk Schools and Waldorf training, but her delivery missed the mark for me. Standard settler beliefs are projected to engage with audiences, promoting a subliminal deep seated disavowal or disregard for people and places. There must be a better way to uplift Indigenous narratives. Just as many have erased our history, how can people of color create a new history with full dignity that cannot be stripped away? Sufficiency and Sankofa, that's how. Africa is the origin of humanity. Study rich gems from the past so we can adjust to our current circumstances and radically imagine the Afro's future.

To understand the landscape of environmental education in Atlanta, I collected online data to show the spatial patterns of this type of education overlayed onto other factors that affect quality of life (Fig. 2). From my map, the "UHI level" is a wealth index that analyzes median family income, employment, and education patterns. Notice the map's extremes; the neon blue reveals low levels of wealth whereas the hot pink represents the peak spots across

Environmental Education (EE) Programs in Metro Atlanta, Georgia 2025



Author: IvoRi Schley of Afro Agriculture LLC

Credits: EE in Georgia, Farm Fresh 24/7,
IPUMS, Esri, TomTom, Garmin, SafeGraph,
FAO, METI/NASA, USGS, EPA, NPS,



Figure 2. Map of Atlanta's EE Programs and wealth index

Metro Atlanta. Highway Interstate 20 is a racial divide for Atlanta (visible from #61 on the west side to the city of Covington on the East side). Black owned EE programs are all south of I-20 and in close proximity to poorer communities. While gathering this data, some Black owned programs would rather be anonymous than be identified on a map.

The map in Figure 2 suggests a scarcity of Afro Environmental Educators. I notice a gap in EE curriculums that lack cultural relevance for people of color. This gap may derive from white-led operations, strategic location and land access, commute, and cost of the programming. I'm not saying all of Atlanta's white operated environmental education programs look like MacEachren's, but there is a possibility. Avoid appropriating, misrepresenting, romanticizing, stereotyping, and other performative acts when discussing Indigenous ontologies (Nesterova, 2020).

I aim to expand on Alayna Schmidt's (2021) work on racially conscious environmental education. As a queer white woman, she encouraged Black and brown youth in Asheville, North Carolina to define nature for themselves since "nature" is a social construct of white supremacy. As a participatory observer leading community art classes, she noticed her presence was a barrier to her own research. The process of art and communication was more important than the results, and her main objective was to disrupt unconsciously reproduced racial oppression. Representation was lacking in her study, and it was so loud that she ended up writing a second paper for her thesis answering, should white women do this type of research at all? She concluded that it depends. I appreciate those leaning on caution, considering cultural sensitivities.

While Schmidt gathered marginalized youths' definitions of nature, I will continue the conversation by sharing meaningful placemaking and relevant culture-keeping with proper representation. I commend art and communication applications as valuable data! I also uplift Black environmental heroes George Washington Carver, John Francis The Planet Walker, Fannie Lou Hamer, Melody Starya Mobley, and my ancestors as inspiration for this project.

Representation in the outdoors can be a challenging topic as marginalized people fight to retrace erased histories. My proposed research offers transformative potential to change nature-human relationships and worldviews. I hope to develop an Afrocentric and decolonized environmental education program.

Folklore, Black Thought Educators, Decolonizing Outdoor Education

I am not a standard educator, so I will not share traditional education and folklore literature. Here I uplift legendary Black Thought Educators Dr. Fukiya and Mama Marimba. The Montessori and Waldorf styles are creative and compliment forest school learning. Black educators have contemplated this too, an Afrocentric expression separate from European influence. Mama Marimba (1980, 1994) is a renowned Anthropologist and author of *Yurugu* (1994), a powerful analysis of Eurocentric thought. She returns us to African-centered spirituality. Everything is alive and connected. Secular, instead of compartments (1980). For the sake of afro-futurism, my work starts with Blacula, not Dracula.

American public school is often critiqued as a racial containment zone (Sojoyner 2017 and 2022). Imagine the pedagogy that nurtures young minds based on outdoor elements. Dr. Fukiya highlights kindezi: the Congo art of babysitting. Kindezi means babysitter, and it's a super

important role in society because you pass on the cultural norms and values to the next generation. Babysitting is one of the most important roles in society and is required from all ages, regardless of disability. Community should ideally be in one accord. If you don't teach them, the television will. This kindezi technique is adapted to school curriculums worldwide with kindezi schools.

Folklore is everything, everywhere, all at once! The daily rhetoric of any region, it's the nuances and all the little particulars that people often overlook. Professor and Folklorist Dr. Constance Bailey reveals how folklore is daily phenomena, everyday conversations, and expressions shared and circulated in informal channels (Bailey 2024; Turner, 2022). Ethnomusician Lamont Pearly (2024) explains folklore as a pattern of behavior agreed upon by informal community interactions. Contemporary folklore is the 85 South Show, Flavor of Love Reality TV Show, Grits and Eggs Podcast, *Children of Blood and Bone* book Series, and the *Parable of the Sower* by Octavia Butler. Representatives of that community should honor and hold the archive of the folklore scroll, not an outsider. Gather the cultural references, otherwise it can get misinterpreted and diluted by outsiders.

As an urban farmer, folklore connects to my work because it's ingrained in culture keeping. Intentional, positive culture keeping is a heavy task but easy peasy because we're just expressing life and oftentimes resistance--like talking to the High John root, using backyard herbs like yellow dock and oregano before our current pharmaceutical healthcare corporations, and growing our own food. It's fun to step away from the real world sometimes to ponder on the

possum's origin and lend an ear for ghost stories and hidden treasures. Culture keeping is invigorating, it sets the tone for the creativity, imagination, and energy potential for the day.

Humans and the environment directly affect each other. Ethnobotany, a method of reflecting on cultural relationships between people and plants, informs my workshops and approach to environmental education by analyzing the various ways plants influence the identity, development, and culture, from cotton shirts to collard greens, to wooden furniture to the beautiful flowers and vines in the background. Consider the usefulness of folklore as we connect youth to the outdoors specific to their regional reality. 5-year-olds are capable of being citizen scientists because they can point out litter and envision a cleaner future (Duhn et al, 2017). Given the opportunity, kids can tell us themselves what components of nature are most valuable to them (Mahidin & Maulan, 2012). Malaysian youth have used photographs to capture and explain meaningful experiences in nature. Nesterova (2020) applied a Taiwanese study for youth to Face The Mountain. When youth are affirmed with a sense of identity, respect and moral obligations to nature are adapted with more ease. Using tests to record acquired skills is limiting; instead, center being present in the process of learning, collaborating, and interacting.

When decolonizing, it is useful to retell generational stories that refute cultural amnesia. I see folklore as a form of decolonization because folklore embodies relevant truths of humanity, denying the colonizer's dominant narrative. With historical context as the backdrop, these fables and proverbs offer wisdom to the lived reality. As a farmer, I frequently hear and say, "Many hands make light work." Grandmas are quick to say, "A lie don't care who tell it." Kendrick Lamar warned us that he'll, "beat yo ass and hide the Bible if God watching." All are useful

sayings with insights that influence the masses. This folklore is decolonization because it disrupts the colonizer's narrative! It's not a formal clean cookie cutter. Anybody can access local lore, just strive to uplift humanity, don't take it away. Folklore rules are created and informed by the local community members. Folklore is geographic. I support lore intended for positive representation of regional lifestyles. Folklore is not an excuse to oppress. It's often described as the peasant's response to oppression. Folklore is often more honest than the textbooks.⁴

Afro-American Lore can be found in books, films, sayings, bible and song verses, blues, jazz, rap lyrics, spiritual and religious beliefs, all art forms, gossip, roasts, and oral tales. Some Afro-American folklore is part of pop culture, and some outsiders are passionate about invading Black spaces. Digital appropriation is among us, from wide exposure to fashion, rap, hair, Ebonics, and other expressions of Black livingness. Folklore can be abused! Language is messy, chaotic, and informed by our backgrounds (Intelextual Media, 2023). Slang is catchy and inspiration comes from everywhere at rapid speed via smartphones.

Folklore is NOT for the invasive extraction of popular culture or Artificial Intelligence. Respect one's position; if you are not a community member, some information does not apply to you, respectfully. Seats at the table are specific. Everyone does not need to attend the cookout. Credit turns appropriation into appreciation, but credit in informal spaces is not guarded like within formal academia. Avoid being exploitative, offensive, or insulting. Afros are more than an

⁴ Folklore can be racist. Nazi and Confederate folklore exists (Janisse et al, 2021). Oral stories are passed down into generations' daily rhetoric, that's how lore stays alive. The folklore I praise is not predicated upon attack and oppression. Whether Minstrel Shows in 1905 or Tiktok in 2025, people think it's okay to copy African American Vernacular or demeanor because it's funny. Blackface then and now is still offensive. It's been diluted in modern times but it's still very present. Take the stories, leave the people (Janisse et al, 2021).

aesthetic. This is a lived experience. Many admire, but everyone cannot fill these shoes.

Appreciate your own culture. If you don't like it, it's up to you to improve it, speaking to all

cultures. Live in your own skin. Understand societal effects, like trendy vs ghetto perceptions.

Try some cultural shadow work. There are some questions only people belonging to the culture should answer.

Katherine McKittrick tells us “stories make place” (Wright, 2023). Stories about maroons gave hope to enslaved Black people and pointed them toward the possibility of—and methods for—their own escapes. This folklore of maroon fugitivity is part of a larger Black folklore tradition that connects marronage all the way to flight from prisons and the police state. As Daryl Cumber Dance (ibid) argues, escape is, “the oldest and most enduring theme in Black folklore and literature,” which often recounts escapes from enslavers, slave catchers and their hounds, sheriffs, the Ku Klux Klan, and prison. Dance goes on to argue that in the “Black folk lexicon, noted for its flexibility, its originality, and its vivid metaphors, there is no idea that has so many different words to express it as the idea of leaving, fleeing, running” (ibid). Maroon folklore offers a vantage point to see the world differently and practice to shape the land according to visions of Black freedom. Black folklore tradition is inspired by maroon folklore, in which they reject authority figures like Ole Massa, the sheriff, and the judge. Brer Rabbit is so popular for this reason, his quick wit always manages him to escape dangerous situations. (Wright, 2023)

Afro-American folklore often involves stories about Voodoo, African religious beliefs in the Americas due to the Middle Passage, or Hoodoo, Afro-American folk magic (Janisse et al, 2021). Our lore also involves the pimps in the 1970s, whose radical defiance may lead him to jail

but remains a dignified urban legend in the hearts of his local community. Lore is also the vampires, ghosts, and witch stories that parents share with their children to ensure they behave. Folklore is the mermaids luring seamen away from their ships, it's Anansi the Spider's superseding strength against the elephant and the whale, and Brer Rabbit escaping the watery jaws of Brer Fox and Brer Bear. Hyperbole or not, these stories are quilts of humanity.

Stories, unlike data, contain an effective legacy of experiences (Vasudaven, 2022). The colonial conquest is gendered; as Earth is raped, Women are also raped. Place-based stories promote place-keeping, an intentional sense of belonging. Ajayi (2018) surveyed Nigerian elderly women, asking them to share folktales and express their opinions towards sustainability threats. Results confirm beliefs that the environment and humans mutually influence each other. Urban migration makes it difficult for grandmas to pass on oral traditions. Farrelly (2019) emphasizes how personal connections to the environment are pivotal for environmental knowledge retention. Kudryavtsev (2012) defines “place-keeping” as a strong place of attachment and ecologically informed sense of place that contributes to pro-environmental behaviors. As Nesterova (2020) echoes above, Tuck and Yang (2012) would strongly suggest to utilize place-based land education for EE to avoid erasure and appropriation, and maybe fight for land back.

In *Pollution is Colonialism* (2021), Liborion gives lively examples of decolonization in modern environmental research. Liborion is the lead scientist of the Civic Laboratory for Environmental Action Research (CLEAR) Canadian lab that checks fish guts for plastics. They repatriate by returning fish guts to nature and the ocean once no longer in use. CLEAR Scientists

also participate in off-camera prayers and land reverence, thanking the former Indigenous fish stewards for their sustainable fishing practices so there's enough fish for research today. It's contradictory to put fish waste in biohazard bags, as this contributes to the global landfill and pollution problem. While active in fish guts, researchers are not allowed to use headphones. They respect the intimate moments with fish and are encouraged to talk to it. The fish samples are edible, so they are eaten. They don't go to waste just because of scientific applications. This lab's protocol defines its own path as anti-colonial in Western research.

The literature review above develops a Framework of Decolonial Afro-Indigenous Environmental Education. The former is in opposition to more traditional environmental education that I briefly discuss here. Flowers (2012) uses standard statistics for her EE program at a summer camp. A statistical emphasis narrows meaningful data findings. For an earthy humanitarian subject, survey results in this environmental space offered flat interpretations. Learning is layered, circular, and multi-dimensional. Inwood and Taylor (2012) created a college elective that combined environmental issues and art. From two colleges across two countries, the common curriculum involved journal entries, field trips, artist lectures, and a final assignment regarding an art piece with the medium of choice. This uncharted effort for environmental art education had some struggles as a newer curriculum, but the students enjoyed it and were inspired to live more sustainable lifestyles. Various scholars have explored alternative environmental education programming for the next Earth stewards. Perhaps the less technical the data is, the easier it is to bond with nature, sustaining a long-lasting relationship as we notice how the outdoors and cultures depend on each other.

3 METHODOLOGY

Project Location and Partners

Childhood memories influence my investments with Bush Mountain. Grandma's house was off Campbellton Rd, a major intersection of the Oakland City and Bush Mountain community, and greater Southwest Atlanta. For at least 25 years, I had the luxury of visiting Grandma's 5-bedroom brick house from the 1940s. The family never renovated her old school stove--that's the job of the millennial gay couple new residents (I drove by a couple times for nostalgia). As the paternal matriarch of my family, visits to Grandma Ola Mae's house meant Thanksgiving dinners, a living room wall full of pictures of her offspring, and an antique room filled with a plastic couch, old speakers, and pictures of her elders. Lovely home, I feel special identifying with this hood. In 2024, she passed away at age 88. I knew nothing of Bush Mountain and WAWA as a child. It's important that I uplift this rich space, leave it better than I found it.

Bush Mountain is alive. This entity breathes as deers, turtles, squirrels, falcons, blue jays, foxes, bats, snakes, frogs, salamanders, rocks, leaves, trees, vines, flowers, fungi, and more. Utoy Creek runs through this old growth forest. Bush Mountain is supervised by colonial ties involving the City of Atlanta, Atlanta Public Schools, West Atlanta Watershed Alliance (WAWA), and independent landowners. I have stewarded Bush Mountain as the farm and environmental education coordinator at the Historic Hartnett Farm, in partnership with WAWA, since 2022.

In 1942, Reverend William Franklin Hartnett officially opened the historically Black Hartnett Elementary as a safe haven for Bush Mountain residents during Jim Crow inside of a portable school until a mysterious fire closed the school in the 1970s. By the 80s, the greenspace was the

Atlanta Preschool Cooperative, the first integrated preschool in Atlanta and Hartnett evolved as a community garden by the 90s/2000s. The shipping container, once Hartnett Elementary's library and kindergarten class, is the farm shed today. Half an acre is the Historic Hartnett Community Garden side and the other half is the Farmer-in-Residency side, totaling about 60 beds on one acre.

Bush Mountain is an old growth forest, or the Big Mama of forests. Where Finney (2014) highlighted greenspaces where coloreds are excluded, Bush Mountain is a safe haven for the Historically Black Oakland City and Bush Mountain community. In these urban spaces, there's some crime, over policing, and KKK terrorists/neo-nazis around, but generally there's more pleasant encounters than trauma. Despite terror threats, we practice Afro-Indigenous land relations anyways. Know the Muscogee Creek. Learn to eat and grow like our ancestors.

Once a lush food forest during Hartnett School years, Bush Mountain and its community lean towards food apartheid conditions today. Bush Mountain itself is less than one acre from the local Kroger, but the community at large has access to a plethora of corner stores and fast food stores in comparison to the one Kroger. In 2023, WAWA donated 1,200 pounds of naturally grown produce to legacy seniors and midwives in the hyperlocal community. Fighting energy burdens (utilities, housing, food), offering mutual aid, and maintaining cultural heritage are key pillars for WAWA's Environmental Justice advocacy today.

WAWA values Afro Ag as an earthy asset for quirky and culturally relevant nature art curriculums. Afro Ag applies intergenerational storytelling and nature art so youth feel connected

to cultural traditions erased by oppression. Passing down storytelling and nature art is imperative as it documents environmental injustices--environmental racism, food apartheid, and further barriers to healthy land relationships. Centering marginalized voices and experiences builds inclusion and representation in the environmental justice movement. This empowers the community with self-sufficiency skills and pride in their heritage. Afro Ag curates Afro-Indigenous ecological knowledge, encouraging collective continuance for historically oppressed and disenfranchised peoples.

Afro Ag is an optimal outdoor education partner, having served as farm educators, hike leaders, yoga instructors, and more since 2018. In Spring 2023, I implemented WAWA Wednesday homeschool programs that engaged youth through nature play, dioramas, teas, grammar play, and socialization. WAWA Wednesdays revealed that at least 50 homeschool families, residing throughout Metro Atlanta, were interested in weekly nature adventure programs. As a pilot program, WAWA collected almost \$1,000 in donations. During a 4 month span of 12 courses, parents repeatedly asked if this was WAWA's first homeschool program, and when was the next one? WAWA Wednesday parents were encouraged to apply to this environmental art series. Afro Ag depends on community feedback to enhance culturally relevant art programs for underrepresented groups. Community knowledge strengthens the quality of the project, as WAWA has served West Atlanta for 30 years! Partnership with WAWA adds prestige, credentials, networking, and support for afro-futurism.

Bush Mountain's legacy continues to live on. Despite being consumed by modern technology, we should practice retaining a relationship with Land as kin. This means super placekeeping in

the form of talking to the plants, eating lunch at the farm, cultural decorations, and saying our ancestors' names. Bush Mountain is a historic and magical old growth forest that encourages creation from nature. Leaf fibers become ropes. Vines are bent to create structure from weaving patterns. Ancient plants are remembered and embraced for their dye capabilities. Playing with nature encourages focus and critical thinking. Plants are food for the body and food for the soul! First aid training promotes independence, confidence, and preparedness in the case of an emergency. These are survival skills home economics courses that convey respectful land use without exhaustion. There's nothing better than turning mundane objects into chaos creation, and the unleashed alchemy provides a memory of functional, sustainable art.

The Historic Hartnett Farm provides amenities like shade, a portable restroom, farm fresh snacks, and rich culture. When youth do not grow up exploring the outdoors, they are more likely not to care about the outdoors. Folklore has no age or degree requirements to reflect on how the hare races the tortoise, how Brer Rabbit cleverly avoids sticky situations, and how Anansi the Spider proved to be stronger than the whale and the elephant. This is especially critical for Black urban youth because nature is often not prioritized in urban spaces.

Encouraging nature play, nature crafts, and tall tales will resurrect ancestral knowledge and enhanced respect for natural elements. A sense of belonging is needed to relate to and reciprocally respect nature. The friendly 22-acre Bush Mountain was our safe haven for Summer 2024.

The Nitty Gritty

To answer, “Will uplifting Afro-Indigenous knowledge inspire environmental stewardship in Atlanta’s urban youth?” Afro Ag’s Survivalnomics workshop series immersed 12 Black homeschool students, ages 7 to 14, in intergenerational earth skills such as cordage, weaving, natural dyes and pigmentation, outdoor cooking, and first aid. From July 11th to August 15th, 2024, urban youth met weekly at Bush Mountain’s Historic Hartnett Community Garden and Farm to practice decolonizing with storytelling and nature art. This research did not collect surveys, statistics, or any math. Data consists of participatory landscape design, focus groups, field notes, and photography zines, to invoke nature connectivity, critical thinking, and cultural pride.

Presented as workshops, participants practiced place-based craft-making and listened to relevant folklore. Workshops were expressed as formal lesson plans (see Appendix A.1). We began with an IRB approved consent workshop and youth mapping. Remaining workshops involved intergenerational crafts. Each lesson plan describes the target audience, location, objective, materials, and teaching procedures. I represented Afro Ag while leading weekly folktales and a nature craft with the homeschool students. Potential assistant educators were wellness professionals, artists, and community organizers passionate about youth leadership and community development. The assistant educator would support the workshop flow, assisting students with technical craft problems or reading folklore.

During Survivalnomics 2024 , youth pursued a nature activity and listened to various tales in every workshop. See schedule outline below:

Afro & Indigenous Lore and Crafts Workshop Series						
Week	Week 1	Week 2	Week 3	Week 4	Week 5	Week 6
Elements Book Series by Simone Nofel	Air	Fire	Water	Earth	Ether	Student's Choice
Activity	Consent + landscape design	Dye	Cordage	Emergency First Aid	Outdoor Cooking	Weaving

Table 1. Survivalnomics 2024 Outline

For the focus group, I asked a variety of questions to gather participants' feedback:

Focus Group Questions for Southeast Living

1. What is nature?
2. What is your home?
3. When you're in nature, does it remind you of home? Why?
4. Did you know you are in Atlanta, GA? Have you been outside of Georgia?....Do those places remind you of Atlanta? Have you been to other places that remind you of home?
5. Did you know these craft items are unique to Atlanta? How do you feel knowing these items are unique to Atlanta?

Workshop Feedback

6. Did the folktales inspire how you made your craft?
7. Does nature describe your space?
8. Is there nature all around you? How would you describe it?
9. Is nature inside or outside?
10. What did you like about today?

11. Would you change anything from this nature day?
12. What was your favorite workshop?
13. Did this nature activity remind you of home?
14. Did this activity make you think about Atlanta? How?
15. Would you try this activity again, at home?

Reflect on Indigeneity versus Colonization

16. Our ancestors were forcibly kidnapped from their homeland and moved to work in the Americas. What do you think our ancestors did before chattel slavery? Did they practice nature crafts in Africa? Did their arts and crafts change in the Americas?
17. Is this handmade item better than something you can buy at the store?
18. Would you choose playing outside over playing with technology?

Afro-Indigenous Environmental Art Education is a non-traditional, decolonized approach to urban nature studies. I created a registration form for the summer workshop series open March 15, 2024 to May 15, 2024. Limited class size and student stipends made this a competitive course for ambitious young environmentalists. Funding for research subjects was a high priority, since culturally relevant Afro-Indigenous stories coupled with nature art is a rarity in environmental education.

To recruit homeschool youth, I practiced word of mouth and online marketing to outreach networks namely Gather Forest School, Ayikah Solutions LLC, The Georgia Black Home Educators Network, Inc, WAWA, Blackhappyparent Inc. and homeschool friends. For decolonization, each class addressed the plight of Afros and Indigenous people through folklore.

Despite hardships, the stories embody respect for nature and holds secrets for a regenerative, holistic, and balanced world. Instead of statistical analysis, qualitative data (focus groups and craft pictures) were used to highlight human knowledge and artifacts. My marketing tone was public-friendly, instead of stiff and condescending.

Participatory landscape design is essentially glorified dioramas, which was a staple activity for this Afro Ag project. Dioramas promote place-keeping as youth play with afro-futurism.

Students dreamed and activated their ideal greenspace by picking natural items that resonate with them and add comfort outdoors. I asked questions and took field notes to gather their interpretation of the cultural, place-based, and indigenous crafts. Art zines are usually short, self-published, and free mini magazines. An art zine was co-created with youth and myself to promote creative sovereignty. Using a 35mm Minolta point and shoot film camera, we collected pictures from each class. Visual aids assisted focus group conversations. Capturing pictures of survival skills and memories of vivid tales may help us understand the world together. Craft zines are quirky, specific, and personally handmade. Break the law to do the right thing sometimes. The informal route gets things done.

Fiber Art: Indigo, Cordage, and Weaving

Fiber art is a great tool for placekeeping, folklore, and history. Fiber art is usable art, tactile, and historical hoodoo. Fiber art is resilient and sustainable. Folklore is literally fashion. Wearable art, what threads are trending? That urban streetwear is hot! Are Nike, Jordans, or UGGs on your feet? These are leather, suede, nylon, polyester, cotton, wool, linen, etc. Whether synthetic or natural fibers, fiber art reflects one's lifestyle and longer histories of place.

Indigo is a cool, modest plant, found in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. Eliza Pinckney is the prized “Mother” of Indigo in the US. Never growing the indigo herself, relying on the wisdom of the enslaved African expert agrarians, Eliza was a female plantation owner in South Carolina known for cultivation and processing of indigo, making this crop a key export during the 18th century. A very expensive and powerful trade, indigo was more powerful than the gun! Indigo was more valuable than sugar and cotton, falling second to rice as a colonial cash crop in this coastal culture (National Park Service; NPR, 2011). *Daughters of the Dust* (1991) is an Afro-American cult classic portraying a Gullah Geechee family living on Sapelo Island in the early 1900s. Here’s a tale of family past catching up with the new. This family used to work on the island’s indigo plantation. With indigo stained hands as a strong scar from the past, now comes the time to decide, will family members move to the mainland and assimilate for social mobility? Or do they stay put, protect family land, and live a simple life? Indigo is beautiful yet has a complex history for Afros. I drew on this rich history to retell the story of indigo as we tie dyed cotton shirts using fresh indigo leaves.

Weaving is an ancient technique, think about all the large and elaborate living room rugs. Some Indigenous communities can make these rugs handmade. Here I praise Keisha Cameron of High Hog Farm in Snellville, Georgia (Highhog.com). While pursuing the Black Sheep Fiber Collective at High Hog, I was introduced to manipulating wool, indigo, leaves, and other fibers and pigments for art and cultural heritage. Fiber vocabulary gets intensive as we review warps (passive fibers), wefts (active fibers threaded through the warp), and beyond.

Basketweaving is a common practice on the Southeast coasts. From Charleston, South Carolina down to Sapelo Island, Georgia, saw palmetto baskets are cultural relics of the lowcountry Gullah Geechee heritage. Three main weaving techniques are coiling, plaiting, and twining (Koros, n.d.). Coiling is sewing. Nature based needle and thread form the popular palmetto baskets. Plaiting is the classic over and under checker pattern, like a potholder or modest rug. Twining involves maneuvering two wefts cross over each other between warps (ibid).

Cordage is useful because plant fibers can be manipulated too, just like our hair. We walk past potential cordage all the time, from pawpaw and dogbane branches to cattail leaves (Gottlieb, 2013). I adapted to local Atlanta vines and shrubs like kudzu, English ivy, grapevine, and Chinese privet to form baskets. When I led public ivy basketweaving workshops at WAWA, the all-ages classes would start with 33 people but end with 5 baskets, including my own. Patient students of all ages can manage cordage crafting and basketweaving. In this workshop, we focused on the classic plaiting over and under method. If youth can make a simple potholder, then an ivy basket may be less intimidating.

Wilderness First Aid and Cooking

Food, clothing, and shelter involve marronage and afro-futurism. These foundations are almost overlooked because they inform how we navigate everyday life. As a Wilderness First Responder, I interpret recovery as medicinal knowledge and knowing how to prepare for disasters. To ensure self-sufficiency, Afro Ag implemented emergency preparedness and basic cooking workshops.

WAWA's vast environmental networks granted me the opportunity to receive Patagonia donated fanny packs for my class's wilderness first aid kits. Those packs were bigger than the youth! Here's a great memory and a bag they can grow into. Keep aloe vera gel around in case of burns, make emergency shelter, and identify the plantains, wood sorrel, and dandelions nearby.

Cooking and wilderness first aid are central to outdoor home economics and serves as a nod to our ancestral root doctors, midwives, and all our herbal cousins who offered natural ailments before the establishment of the modern healthcare system. As we harvest and forage in moderation, we thank our ancestors, both plants and people, for passing down seeds.

Knowing how to grow food, harvest, and forage are quintessential pieces for an outdoor based home economics program. I make this intention explicit since the workshop is based at a historic farm and the greater Bush Mountain. Horticulture is the art and science of producing nutritious food for the body and beautiful food for the soul. Food holds status, geography, nutrition, and is casually vital. Food is a privilege and should be appreciated. As a Southerner, our common foods are collard greens, black eyed peas, cornbread, pokeweed, turkey legs, wings, mac n cheese, and so on. Folklore entails food because it's such a heavy culture keeper, gathering community to

make memories (Spelman College Food Studies, 2025). Staple crops like wheat, rice, and corn carry the world, and regions navigate their foodways by circumstance.

Folkloric Influences for Environmental Art Education

My writing style is inspired by readings from authors Zora Neale Hurston, Toni Morrison, Langston Wilkins, Ashante Reese, and Carolyn Finney. The way they articulate the Black experience deeply resonates; it's impressive for scholars to show intellect without talking above the common person. Whether writing in the shade of political ecology, folklore, or literature, these scholars encourage me to courageously express myself casually. Understand the bigger picture, see and feel life from my perspective as the researcher and the active participant.

Throughout Survivalnomics, folklore set the stage for each workshop and brought the youth into the day's activities.

Folklore is embedded in the historical context of real life events. It's the everyday informal that influences life and culture (Bailey, 2024). Folklore is the truth when the oppressor is out of earshot, which is why the barbershop and hair salon settings are so sacred and endearing (Nunley, 2011). So are roasts, if you have the wit and heart for them. Turner (2022) teaches us that folklore is not identical, but adjacent to gossip, myth, rumor, and conspiracy. Folklore is your favorite song, proverbs, kid songs on the playground. Our colorful actions set intentions in our daily rituals, whether righteous, wicked, or neutral. People are the needle, and the lore is the thread.

As stated above, folklore is also fashion. Imagine cultural stories about fashion. *The Emperor's New Clothes* (2000) is a distinct folktale from childhood, in which a vain leader is swindled into buying invisible threads. How are people represented in folktales? Do they look raggedy or dressed to impress? Cultural characters play their roles wrapped in fibers like silk, cotton, indigo, burlap, and other adornments. Afro-Indigenous Folklore involves fiber art in terms of Black and brown hands practicing cordage, cotton, indigo dying, basket weaving, and herbalism.

Whether fashion, music, or speech, folklore reveals a variety of art. Ethnomusician Lamont Pearly stresses to place the Blues Narrative in the proper context because there's a racist framing of Black life. We've been Othered for so long but financially robbed of our talents. Pearly (2024) notes that folklore has a direct connection to Hoodoo, Voodoo, Ifa, Hebrewism, and Christianity. In southern folklore, Blacks caught practicing Hoodoo was equated to rape, murder, death, and arson charges. Folklore is also the mojo bag, manipulating common household items, applying hexes and good luck charms, protecting hair, using oils and candles, not sweeping over feet, being intentional and resourceful! It's all secular, spiritual, and Hoodoo. Hoodoo can be admired for its strength, resilience, and adaptation. But it's the real time, active, everyday rituals. How resourceful are you and what do you stand for? Your beliefs become the rhetoric for daily folklore.

People who share and receive folklore know not to take folktales literally. There's usually some morals or a life lesson to take home and chew on. The Soucouyant and Blaxploitation era are both thrillers about the overlooked, both literal and cinematic, which makes me smile. I enjoy

movies like Coonskin, Rudy Ray Moore The Human Tornado, and Foxy Brown of the 1970s. Sometimes there's justice but sometimes it's just fun being the bad guy. We've been painted as bad creatures for so long, so why not have fun with it? These characters are all so badaaaaaaassssss, 50 years later! Blaxploitation films are often replicated, but they will never be the same as the originals during the charged politics of the 70s and 80s.

When I pray, I bless the chef, the grower, and thank the Ethers for the nutrition I am about to receive. Prayers conclude with an Amen, Ase, Inshallah, or whichever your preference. Soil is a whole ecosystem full of life. If you stare at one place in a pile of dark brown soil, you may eventually notice there's tons of ants and other things crawling around. Don't freak out now, but they're everywhere. The abundance of a pile of soil is reflected in one forest, or one town, one country, one continent. Life and movement surrounds us, regardless if we notice it. Just be clear on your preference. That's some of my folklore. See Figure 3 to gather the phenomena of Afro-American folklore.

Black youth are encouraged to dream of Afro-futuristic worlds not concentrated in racial capitalism. This curriculum is intended for the next generation of urban green leaders in radical education. This prioritizes Black educators teaching Black youth. Others can learn this too, but marginalized people need to take up space first. A sense of cultural identity is fundamental to imagining a sense of belonging in the near future. Students will define their own narratives as they explore self-determination and afro-futurism.

My thesis ties environmental education with cultural relevance from a farmer's perspective. As an urban agrarian, land access is the most peculiar historical hurdle that never seems to be resolved. From sharecropping to the Homestead Act and the Black Codes, Afros and Indigenous folks never had a real chance for generational wealth. In the early 1900s, about 14% of farmers were Black. By 2022, just 1% of farmers identify as Black (Meredith, 2022). There's a resurrection in the environmental justice movement as Afros combat food insecurity and other socioeconomic burdens in our current global climate. When you're not the landowner, land can be swept away from you at any moment. That's a terrible blow after investing so much soil health and enrichment! Nature is free therapy. Why do politics shape our ability to hang with trees and flowers? Farmers are culture keepers, guiding the community how to treat nature, how to eat like our ancestors, and how to radically determine our foodways in spite of the aggressive industrial agriculture system.

Fighting Black land loss is a weary but inevitable fight. Poor Farmers don't have health insurance. These needs are overlooked while we manage temperance of animals or metal equipment that casually offer concussions. Being an urban farmer is a lot like being a starving

artist. Look, I grew this tomato from seed! Look at how healthy and pretty it is. Too bad no one cares. Novice farmers fight for financial sustainability, which requires proper scaling and community support to pair the produce to the seller/storefront. Cooperatives, restaurants, mom and pop stores, schools, hospitals, and beyond, everyone depends on food. Keep it culturally relevant and in tune with the available climate. Watch your ecological footprint. It can be challenging for academics and nonprofits to escape the plantation owner/sharecropper mentality. Farmers are cultivating a relationship with a living entity, but oftentimes the corporation only sees dollar signs. With my position as an urban farmer, I want to give myself, the community, and the Land flowers that we deserve. This can be achieved by slowing down and gathering for gratitude.

This study is an attempt to prepare for a more just agriculture future that values survival skills, Afro-Indigenous ecological knowledge, food sovereignty and cultural connections.

Survivalnomics 2024 is intended to encourage more Black urban youth to participate in and shape environmental education that is culturally relevant and place specific. Environmental art education can nurture community healing through ancestral knowledge, honoring lineage and building intergenerational wisdom. Black homeschool students benefited from a summer series of ancestral knowledge, nature art, and an invigorated respect for nature. Folk storytelling and nature art counter historical amnesia, reconnecting youth to culture erased by oppression.

Afro-Indigenous storytelling brings relief from dehumanization through animated storytelling, rhythm, movement, and communal catharsis. This program will encourage Black homeschool youth to explore their lost culture and build community. Decolonization was actively practiced

by practicing Sankofa; we look back into the past to carry knowledge that prepares us for a self-determining future. Survival crafts align with home economics, and ultimately connect to Indigenous rites of passage. What does it mean to be a self-sufficient human? Sewing, growing food, cooking, herbal medicine, etc. Functional and decorative creations from scratch are concepts we borrow from ancient times. My curriculum exemplifies how, even in urban spaces, we can use natural resources without exhausting them. Afro-Indigenous ontologies will teach us that respecting nature is a life skill. Afro-futurism is talking to trees, making mud pies, laying in the grass to watch the clouds, verbally complimenting the green-ness in a plant's leaves, talk to plants like they are people, walk barefoot in a forest, learn arts and crafts, learn how to build a fire, share campfire stories, respect the ants and the deers and Brer Rabbit.

If youth can enjoy nature, sample fresh food, and find beauty in vines, then the project succeeds. We hope parents will brag about their adventurous children preferring forests over screens. Environmentalism is tied to history, race, gender, and culture (Williams, 2021). Reconnecting with ancestral practices enables healing and understanding. This environmental art experience aims to equally spark wonder, environmental ethics and pride in Southern cultural heritages. The future health of the land and youth depends on this reconciliation of culture and nature connections.

4 REFLECTION

Survivalnomics 2024 reviewed a variety of curriculum: consent, natural dyes, cordage making, wilderness first aid, cooking, and weaving classes. You already know there were butterflies, fuzzy bees, and Black ants. We had a great time with IvoRi the agrarian.

Weekly Curriculum

Week 1: Consent and Landscape Design 7/11

On the consent day, I was wearing high waisted pants and a cowrie crown suited for an urban agrarian. Youth wore shorts and a variety of athletic shirts. It was a standard hot sunny day where we gathered around picnic tables to listen to my boring speech. Paperwork disclaimers went well. I reviewed topics such as “Muscogee, forfeit, zine, geography, and banned books”. Maybe I should have decolonized more. Youth don’t care about reading rules, regulations, and IRB boundaries. Sitting there and listening was agonizing. They shifted their weight restlessly from one foot to another. “Can I pick some wood sorrel?” “Can I go play?” “How long do we have to sit here?” A brief youth-oriented call and response was all the youth needed:

“Bottom Line: Why are we here?”

“To learn about ancient nature, crafts and culture.”

“Can you miss days and still get paid?” Jumble in responses, I reminded them they can only miss one day because life happens.

“And remember, you can get kicked out of the program.” soft threat. “Any questions?”

Objections? Alrighty, let’s get to reading. “

We started with *Air* and breathed together. Both youth and adults enjoyed Zora Neale Hurston's *Lies and Other Tall Tales*. Parents were particularly tickled about Zora mentioning the US government holding the biggest lies. Volunteers were in the farm background. A couple of extra youth were present and they participated in the diorama activity. Calm creativity. Parents worked with their kids to forage items for their dioramas. Smiles and glue sticks that lost their caps.

At the very end of the consent day, a bee swarmed me and tried to sting my mouth. It got really close to my lip and mouth, but I managed to leave unstung! Just spooked and mildly sore. As an Environmental Educator, I strongly believe informal education is best. Dioramas provide a space for a calm harvest and joyful bonding. We retain memories of spontaneous delight. The diorama was a nice counter to irb destruction. The IRB is a direct contradiction to my decolonizing efforts. Stand firmly on my views like the Canadian scientist Liborion and those plastic fish guts. The bee attacking me was like a mean old relative reminding me to not let these suckers (academic institutions) change me.

Week 2: Natural Dyes 7/18

Natural dyes may have been my favorite class. 5/10 would pursue indigo class again! What a fresh harvest! The first hour was so-so, class was delayed as I searched for all the materials. 4/10 prefer indigo over technology. Dye day was a success! We read *Fire* and Dorson's *American Negro Folktales*. In this story, Brer Rabbit added other animals in his risky circumstance, pulling himself out of a hole while also avoiding being eaten by Brer Bear. Class ended early due to thunder and lightning. I remember the twinkling sun. We could smell water in the air for the approaching storm.

After the dye class, students wore the shirts to class often. The dye would fade the more they wore their shirts. Much pride in what they created. On the day of the dyes, we were racing the thunder. You could taste the thick humidity in the air. One student wore a sailor costume.

Focus groups flowed well. I would start a sentence and ask them to finish it. The following is focus group responses to the questions in the methodology section:

- Nature is...

Plants...life...animals...creation of God.

- Home is...

Shelter...cover...make it your own.

- Our ancestors lived around nature. What nature do you think was around them?

Houseplants...food...kitchen bugs...mosquitos...rats...roaches...beetles...Black soldier flies.

- Farms in West Atlanta (*home*) connect to (*places where students have travelled*):

Georgia, North Carolina, Florida, South Carolina, Texas, Illinois, Idaho, and Belize.

- Nature is inside too...Nature is in the home as...

plants, tables, phones, computer, air, tv, technology, food, sun, and wifi

- Think about Indigo Day. How does Indigo remind you of home?

String, jeans, shirt. Here I informed them that Indigo was a slavery crop.

In summary, their responses informed me that nature is not man-made. Nature is home. Nature is relatable and place-based. Our space is unique. Our ancestors knew plants that we still use today.

We may have connected to a simple truth, a simple foundation. Plants connect us to the past, present, and future.

Week 3: Cordage Making 7/25

Cordage was more challenging for them. The sisters in the class caught on well. Easier concept if you practice hair, because that's a popular component of girlhood. We read *Water* and *O is for Orisha* by Christopher Swain. One youth expected O is for Orishas as a banned list. So I explained what standards define "banned books". They responded by claiming Jesus as their Lord and Savior through Christ. One student said, "Is this real? Is this still folklore?" I told him It's as real as you want it to be. Nature deities, angels are everywhere. *O is for Orisha* offered a variety of Elemental, Life, and Death characters. Shango surrounded us in recent thunderstorms, rain wave after an Atlanta heat wave. Five out of ten (5/10) students enjoyed this book.

Youth had to practice scraping the plant leaf guts gently. If too aggressive, then only broken scraps of the plant fiber remain. We had a water bucket to rejuvenate the leaf, cause it gets dry. Fiber gets nappy like hair, go figure. Youth took advantage of the water play, making splashed and taking extra dips on already wet leaves. Plant options were snake plant and yucca. Other local cordage options are sorrel, hibiscus, sesame, and kenaf. They were tired after the first two options, which is fine because I'm not as familiar with the others anyway.

Some did not care for the cordage class. Not a fan! The twisting technique was too tedious. "Learning cordage is useless..they [plant fibers] smell like mold". Cordage uses include

chains, hair tie, fishing line, emergency rope, bracelet, rope, and shoelaces. Hopefully frustrated students will have a change of heart as they mature.

Week 4: Wilderness First Aid 8/1

We had a great hike on the Wilderness First Aid day. It's important to save a life, or your own. The Muscogee Creek used plants like comfrey, plantain, raspberry, dandelion, elderberry, violet, What about Peaches? We read *Earth and Little Black Sambo* by Helen Bannerman, where a young Black boy showed resilience against intimidating tigers and they eventually melted into butter. Little Black Sambo ate 169 tiger pancakes. How impressive. Youth were surprised to know Sambo was considered a banned book. I then explained the list of popular old stereotypes like Pickaninny, Jezebel, Sambo, and Jim Crow.

The sporks were extra popular. They couldn't contain themselves over the sporks. They kept poking each other or using them as swords. Some sporks were confiscated as soon as they were given. Understandably hard to resist, speaking as an adult who loves functional tools. Gratitude for my male Guest Educator friend on wilderness day. We used the movement opportunity to notice how bark can become cordage, tying in last week's activity. They enjoyed the fanny pack and the hike. We stopped at a couple of intervals in between the hike, describing how to save a body if someone's intestines fall out, or if you burned yourself, or if you broke your foot. One student expressed, "It's important to know how to survive".

Next Time! I will share how to make a clove hitch backboard and more herbal identification. "I stepped on a tin. The tin bent. And I skated out of there." Quirky. Intrinsic. Classic. Necessary.

Four out of ten (4/10) favored the 1st aid class, 5/10 favored tie dye, and 1 student was indifferent.

Week 5: Cooking 8/8

The cooking day was something particular because Mr. Robert, the Muscogee elder also visited this day. Together, we Read Ether and the High John story in Zora's *You Don't Know Us Negroes*. This was my favorite tale of the series because I view these old folktales on a pedestal equal to the old Greek mythology. High John was a new concept for everyone except Mr. Robert. In the presence of a Muscogee elder, they shared the utmost attention and respect. This stranger travelled hours to talk to y'all. Listen to what he has to say. Mr. Robert was great; he talked about Mr John Ross who helped slaves, TheThe Trail of Tears, Andrew Jackson, Dakota Pipeline, Navajo Nation, and the medicine wheel.

Youth enjoyed reading outside, For some, this was the first time they cooked outside (besides a BBQ). I bought a new gasoline grill but didn't know how to use it. And I left my portable generator at home that day so we just made a salad and it was great. "The salad took the show...It's bussin!" Success. There's hope when youth can still appreciate a salad. Lettuce, tomato, basil, sunflower seeds, arugula, mustard greens, and Italian dressing. Based on laughter, socialization, and nature applications, I will conclude that they had a great time.

It's agreed that real food is better than Minecraft food...and eight out of ten (8/10) kids were present. They killed random ants and trees, from pure youth, joy, and fun? Respect your ancestor, bro. Some of them quickly forgot or didn't care that this exercise was for their ancestors. Some

refused to participate or give a second try on crafts. Often I had to revisit WHY we respect the land...this is a safe space, grow people and minds. Not pepper grenades. Stop killing the ants. I had limited back up help. Planned for more, did not consider enough Plan B or C. All prevailed, the students listened enough. They were not strangers for long.

Week 6: Weaving 8/15

Weaving day was highly anticipated! 8/10 kids present. We read mermaid, hidden treasure, and ghost folktales from Dorson. We also read *Lies and Other Tall Tales* by Zora again while they were weaving. It was a great start but a couple people gave up. Some just started cutting up yarn randomly. The attention span was not there for some, but others took yarn home to complete their projects.

The setting was so nice, “The farm looks like a whole forest.” Cherry tomato bushes made their own jungles, and so did the okra because I planted them kinda close. Too close? Probably not, it was a most beautiful sight to experience. Volunteer squashes sprawl around the lettuce. One youth requested a bigger cardboard loom to make a blanket for the next time. They were inspired to start personal home projects after class.

It was a regular hot humid sunny day. I tend to overlook the sweat. It’s Georgia in the middle of the summer, of course I was sweaty. I brought water to ensure hydration among the youngins. Craft zines were created at the end of cooking and weaving classes.

Students would occasionally run off for a quick snack. The farm is their oyster, who am I to interfere with some yummy wood sorrel or mustard greens? There's the sorrel like the Caribbean hibiscus shrub, another sorrel is a cute groundcover clump of leaves, and then there's wood sorrel, a pleasantly sour volunteer groundcover with yummy flowers and seed pods. Once identified, students can't leave it alone!

When time permitted, we ended the day with free play. Tag was a popular choice. Some boys harvested peppers to use as grenades! There was fun, laughter, movement, and peer-to-peer epiphanies. Sometimes we would play a geography game. Depending on the stick you draw, play charades so the group can guess the cultural sport or dance. Although initially against it, they quickly eagerly awaited their next turn to challenge each other's geography trivia, from Mexico to Madagascar, Morocco to Maine.

While reflecting on Survivalnomics, I revisit the questions that prompted this experiment, addressing Folklore, Placekeeping, and the effects of Afro-Indigenous Nature Art on urban youth.

Folklore

Youth had no resistance to storytime. This was quite an active social hour enjoying each other's company. Learning social dynamics and boundaries. I had to stop and remind them not to kill the farm ants. They matter too, just as important as us. Boys can be a little wild and destructive, throw stuff and kill little things. I shared a variety of life skills, but consideration for the smallest

lives still needs to be revisited. Takes a while to nurture something else when frontal lobes are still developing. Childhood is a wild time.

Not sure if I properly stressed how the finished products were all sourced from raw natural resources. I wonder if I decolonized enough. I remind them that ants are our friends. Don't kill nature! They appreciated the many craft options, and that they could take home the shirt, weaving, cordage, and first aid kit. More older kids and more staff would improve the balance of this program.

Weaving was one student's favorite activity. Backup support was greatly appreciated, especially when male educators were present. Crowd control was difficult when I was the only educator. I think one of the best parts was taking pictures. In this classic 1990s film camera, each film roll captures around 30 pictures. Students took turns capturing memories. One student in particular, I told him to take 5 and stop when the top number says 15. I walk away to do something. When I checked on Student A, the film was all used up within five minutes.

Popular books were *Ether* by Simone Nofel and *Lies and other Tales* by Zora Neale Hurston. Uplifting old school knowledge and cultural heritage inspires connection, relevancy. Imagine our elders sharing similar stories on this same land. In between all this technology, we can still explore with respect. Indigo shibori can be uplifted with weaving, cordage, 1st aid, cooking, etc. and the Orishas! All of these concepts are old school but they come from nature. We can be very resourceful when we depend on nature's rich resources before exhaustion.

Folklore holds a friction where the past meets the present. Today, urban legends stay alive through cinema. Consider, candyman, boogeyman, hansom and gretel, etc (Janisse et al, 2021). This may explain why storytime interactions seemed natural for the participants. There's a natural curiosity for stories of the past. One youth explained a Brer Rabbit story I read. In this version, he sneakily welcomed animal friends to be a barrier between him and Brer Bear to avoid getting eaten. Hope for the future lies in folklore. Folktales live in youth forever because these stories are full of life. Folklore doesn't expire, it's a live document. Active, present tense. Inspired by previous creative expressions. Youth are instilled with forever tools, manipulating nature and stories from our ancestors. Indigo is beautiful with a complex history. Although indigo was a slave crop, indigo is beautiful, calming, and we should continue to wear it! Sowing radical mental seeds they can chew on for later. Unteach colonizer mentality! Pay attention to stories. Students create the experience and folklore adds color to the day.

Folklore is geographic; it's for the culture, it's the live action part of the day, and character development for both young and old. Regional cultures have unique, rich folklore that lies in the informal. Colorful conversations happen so fast it's rarely documented. Afro-American folklore is the barbershop talks, the roasting or dirty dozens, Ebonics, the ingredients in the spice cabinet, and also jazz, blues, and hip-hop. Folkloric imaginations make great conversation for focus groups, landscape design, and zine creation for this study. afro-futurism is experienced through art; books, paintings, cinema, smartphones, and active everyday life. Folklore and nature crafts can bring an enticing curiosity, vaguely explaining a broad significance to strange old stories and playing with plant parts. Sankofa teaches us that knowing past gems helps orient one's future. This course was a soft start introduction to self-determination and afro-futurism.

Placekeeping and Being of a Place

Langston Collins Wilkins' PhD dissertation exploration of Hip Hop in Houston (2023) influenced how I approach my participatory research in this Master's thesis. Although a Houston native, Wilkins is a privileged PhD candidate who spent a couple decades away from home. As participant and observer, he noticed the need to offer a voice for the overlooked within his personal geography. How did he feel reconnecting to rappers, pimps, slab owners, and formerly incarcerated members in his old community, weighing against his academic privileges? Throughout the duration of this graduate program, the CSAW crew--faculty and staff, community fellows, and grad students--met frequently on the top 26th floor of a GSU building in downtown Atlanta. This crew had exclusive access to skyscraper heights as we casually watched the jam packed I-75 highway from our top view. Both Wilkins and I are supporting communities to share safe spaces (literal and figurative) to reminisce on the past and present, ultimately preparing for the future. Visiting the 26th floor sometimes feels like the gathering of Du Bois's Talented Tenth, transgressing the Atlanta streets to the 26th floor. As I progress academically, I maintain a subtle urge to remind myself to stay grounded in the community. Nurture a communal sense of belonging to places, from Houston to Bush Mountain.

Zora Neale Hurston was too colonized when she began archiving folklore. Her expensive dresses and formal dialect were barriers to her research, to connect with the community (Hernandez, 1996). Similarly, the consent workshop was too formal. Youth don't want to be read paperwork. EE is informal. There's no need to stray away from that. You don't need a degree to be an active contributor to folklore, and the same can be said about environmental education. Did Zora Neale Hurston hesitate like I did? Horticulture is my scientific background. I tensed with reluctance

that this data is not explicit enough. Not enough surveys. But Liborion taught me that culture has implicit parts too...art, communication, spirit, and place. Liborion, Hurston, and I focus on storytelling in places that represent positive memories for culture and nostalgia, despite political restrictions.

The place itself is of pivotal significance. We connect to native land before transplants and gentrification swallow sacred origins. This one's for Grandma Ola Mae and Ben Hill! Southwest Atlanta is getting gentrified with million dollar homes next to old school grandma types of homes. It's so important for us to be the ones representing and taking up space. Blues scholar Lamont Pearly reminds us not all gatekeeping is bad. Diversity is good, there's something to appreciate from every culture. Some cultural exchanges are exclusive for the specific culture, not outsiders. This version deserves respect, not attack. Wilkins (2023) flowed with the rappers' conversations. He's hanging out with rappers and former drug dealers. Every conversation will not be documented. Imagine what it's like to interview kids. Something left to be wondered. While affected by food apartheid, we manage to share gratitude over a garden salad. A freshly picked garden salad on top of Bush Mountain next to where the Atlanta Black Crackers used to play. How many people can share that sentence as truth? That's the placekeeping. The cultural pride, stand a little taller. Homeschool is a unique challenge because it's not something to tame, triumph, and control, it's a flow.

I think youth took home the significance of place. Placekeeping strengthens when folks learn niche skills at a unique place. If I could change anything, I would improve the cooking and wilderness classes. I'm overly critical. A raw meal was refreshing, but my oyster mushrooms are

critically acclaimed! And a clove hitch knot has helped me escape sticky situations safely. Start home economics early.

In response to the Survivalnomics curriculum, something clicked when they visited Mr. Robert the Muscogee elder. He must know something about Georgia land. Every week, we gather to talk about using the land at Bush Mountain without harming it, and here we sit before walking history, learning from a local Native American who again reinforces that Land is special and people who protect the land have been wronged. As long as we are breathing, we continue to care for Nature. Based on one's specifically unique location, we can animate rich history with place-based crafts. Local houseplants, local wool, local salads, local sports, local meetup spots, local Muscogee. Folklore is valuable. Art is Environmental Justice. Don't silence or ease us into amnesia. Know tobacco, cotton, indigo, tomato, pepper, mermaids, herbs, and Brer Rabbit. These pieces make a whole story. I hope youth gathered a new lens for their cousins.

Effects of Afro-Indigenous Nature Art on Urban Youth

Youth interactions reveal a yearning for Afro-Indigeneity. Some crafts were too hard, depending on development stages and interest. Sporks became swords and were confiscated. Uplifting indigenous knowledge did influence youth positions in land stewardship. This was an opportunity to see nature as kin. Hopefully the memory of me being upset about drowning ants will recollect their memories later down the years.

Throughout the duration of this research, I wondered if Atlanta urban youth could value nature more than technology after farm exploration. No, but it was a nice try. Although I did not directly research this, observations revealed a clear answer. My rhythm of developing the film meant the

last round of pictures were available after the last day of Survivalnomics. I offered to deliver the last pictures to homes or local meeting spots so youth could finish their zines. During a casual round checking in on families after Survivalnomics, I learned that the majority of youth spent their money on tablets and roblox. It's a balance competing with this high technology age. We're fighting with a Skibbidy toilet over here. Folklore is still important in the AI Gore internet era that consumes our attention. Folktales are quirky, daring, spicy, and strange. People globally appreciate a good storytime.

King and Whitaker (2019) offer examples of solidarity. We all can relate to High John and maroon energy. Prevail despite fear. McKittrick (2006) and Finney (2019) address this too. Who's the demon? Who's the terrorist? Placekeeping with afro permaculture encourages us to refuse to conform to indoctrination.

Practice resisting the colonizer mentality. Decolonizing requires being intentional, but it can be as simple as repeating your ancestors's stories. Creature comfort upholds colonization.

Appliances support sedentary living, go to corporate department stores because we have no time for handmade items. But we actually do! Start small to specialize and strategize. Know how to navigate your immediate surroundings. Know the local inhabitants before today's colonization. Don't erase others. Invite the indigenous, try the food, share the folklore, try to uplift the source as much as possible, always. Respect and admire other cultures. Avoid historical amnesia. Take caution as we attempt to avoid temporary prolonged, delayed genocide. Radically dream a just world with you in it.

Homeschooling is a privilege, and I noticed the youth primarily come from two parent homes. There's an evident wealth gap in Atlanta, aka Black Hollywood, or Hollywood of the South. We see a variety of economic classes in downtown Atlanta. Strikingly visible wealth gap where a millionaire corporate suit passes multiple houseless communities downtown. Driving in Atlanta neighborhoods, mansions transgress to shoddy apartments on the same street! Single-parents may want a better quality of life but systemic oppression establishes a lack of resources, forcing working class families to work a crappy job and send their youth to questionable childcare, systematically crippling single parent homes.

Why are more people not free to do outdoor nature based work? As a result of public school k-12, I attest that state education standards are indoctrination for the status quo; our current lifestyle makes public schools more convenient than homeschool because of work schedules and literacy confidence. How can this elite offgrid programming be available for marginalized low-income? Consider bartering, collective economics, and workforce training. Skill sharing will always be useful for self-sufficient communities.

The boys were rowdy sometimes. I was advised to have more staff, especially male staff because sometimes respect is absent. Kids are rude sometimes. Returning to coming-of-age rites of passage ceremonies may be a useful necessity to ground and prepare youth for the future.

My research highlighted urban homeschoolers living in Atlanta because of my personal connections and methodological approach to working from existing relationships. Yet, as the research continued, I came to define Atlanta Black homeschoolers as a type of modern maroons

because they assert an alternative expression of creativity and survival. Homeschoolers, like maroons, defined their lifestyle on their own terms despite the Settler's American Dream. Results may look different if my audience was derived from local public schools.

Robert the Muscogee Elder showed the youth and myself how the environment and land are political by uplifting the Muscogee River in Macon, the Trail of Tears, The South Dakota Pipeline, and explaining the Medicine Wheel. Many people of color are accustomed to harsh rules in favor of the oppressor's quality of life. Biased rules everywhere determine who gets access to nice land and healthy food. The environment is tied to history, race, gender, and culture (Williams, 2021). Realize it's not slavery to like nature. Bush Mountain has land significance. Explore local rivers and mounds, how did people navigate before the highway? Practice life survival skills. Be loud. Be free. Move! Create small homemade batches. Talk and sing to your plants. Boost their confidence too. Get personal with your park and garden. Your cousin is waiting for the next reunion.

Historical Amnesia may encourage low-income communities to blame themselves for their polluted surroundings. Work ethic and drive are useful skills, but we cannot always blame the individual for poor quality of life. The joy of the marginalized is indefinitely in last place behind the ventures of settler colonialism. The Afro is a spectrum, not just the ghetto. It's okay to start from the middle. Ghetto conditions are the result of oppressive experimentation, crowding people in an under-resourced setting and over policing is inclined to disastrous results. Afros today struggle to meet basic needs because when we thrived, our communities were destroyed and we were lynched. Historical records of systemic oppression justify our distrust in

Eurocentric policies. Remember the broken treaties and 40 acres and a mule. White Supremacy is a public health hazard.

Complex Findings and Other Thoughts

Youth responses reveal hand-picked foods taste better and it's magical creating tie dye using plants! The message is don't rely on the oppressor; know how to provide for self. Old school ways are sacred for a reason. Dioramas reveal new school maroons like flowers and waterfall sounds because they are peaceful. Youth are curious about what older generations have to say. Views from the 1920s are closer to us than the dinosaurs. There's strong comprehension for Brer Rabbit and Ghost stories. Age old stories caught the attention of these Gen Zers. Art and nature are age-old enticers that continue to prove true. Plants and people need each other.

Considering forced labor of slavery and versatility required for marronage, I imagine some of these members did not always enjoy laborious tasks. Somebody complained about picking cotton, making baskets, or making pottery and arrows. Some Afros don't want an agricultural career. Jim Crow harsh working conditions plus society stigmas equates social mobility to leaving sharecropping and heading to the big city to elevate.

Similarly, arts and crafts is not everyone's specialty. Fiber art is challenging! Patient students of all ages can manage cordage craft making. Cordage and basket making includes many dynamics like the proper thickness of "thread", twisting direction of plant fiber, and the science of measuring chemicals and placing the needle in the perfect position. Survivalnomics is not for everyone. But this is folk knowledge, useful life skills to carry for your whole entire life!

“Doomsday prepping” is not for everybody. Not always welcomed and embraced. As Ruth Gilmore suggests, I am building freedom as a place, by knowing your root origins (Gilmore et al, 2024). Folklore is about the past and the present determining the future, in non-linear ways. Almost metaphysical. We carry these stories and live with them as a present for the future. Hence, Sankofa becomes a lived experience.

There are issues with mainstream Environmental Education. Public school pushes youth to conform while recycling a narrow perspective of US history. Youth may get rude when they are not mentally nourished. Build freedom as a place despite saturated distractions. Consider life before tablets. Marronage as homeschooling is an important tool for resistance! I have attempted to share the findings on my brief nature based curriculum, inspired by Afro-Indigenous ecological knowledge (old marronage), applied on urban homeschooled Afros ages 8-14 (new marronage). Marronage may offer one of the best examples to practice decolonizing traditional environmental education. Assert alternative routes for creativity, freedom, and expression. Guided by Afro-Indigenous marronage, I applied place based life skills to encourage viewing nature in a resourceful and harmonious lens. It’s all art and necessary.

Overall, Survivalnomics 2024 is a success with nomadic and regional potential. This is highly replicable. Make it shake with available resources. You can do this too! I offer wordy reflections and lesson plans. Using radical expression, old marronage meets new marronage. If Survivalnomics was a fable, then the takeaway lesson is Nature is alive, important, and deserves respect as your kin. I encouraged youth to look at nature’s versatility, see nature in a different

light. This is a newer concept for people born after 2000, but our obese technology lifestyle is new. Collect community off camera too.

5 CONCLUSION

Here I describe my final art exhibit at the Atlanta Black Cracker practice field and offer next steps for afro-futurism.

Planning a Field Day

I decided to hold the grand opening of my art exhibit at the ABC Atlanta Black Cracker Field, which is a unique token for Bush Mountain. Bush Mountain is a 22-acre food forest in a Historically Black space. Members of The Negro League Baseball, The Atlanta Black Crackers were residents of Bush Mountain and would frequent this field to practice and play when the “whites-only” field, designated for the Atlanta Crackers, was unavailable.

Curating this event required a team. My homeschool staff provided support for this moment. Beyond this thesis, I have worked with WAWA since 2022, and I’ve had homeschool intentions since 2023. I’ve witnessed limited activity at the ABC Field. The ABC field is active when children play during WAWA camps, neighbors visit their local park, and through occasional tours and annual camping events where WAWA shows off the vast and sacred land. I’ve never seen an intentional event that uplifts the historical sports here. Activate nature play for the inner child, as much as we are still physically able! Since play is necessary, an outdoor field day is most appropriate. Reminisce on what you learned, run, and smile. I implemented an intentional and historical reference to The Atlanta Black Crackers Team. In the past, we swung the bats. Tonight, we kick.

Creating an art exhibit in this space specifically is very important. We could sit in a building, how formal. Let’s go outside until the street lights come on. To run and play alongside ABC

spirits is uplifting and serves as a form of reverence. We remember y'all, watch us run and hold space for community. Therefore, this art exhibit is filled with cardboard, glitter, and history. This project is grounded with environmentally friendly intentions. Don't use spray paint shortcuts, use paint. Cardboard boxes are free.⁹⁹ En route to afro-futurism, I painted the boxes black and created my interpretation of a galaxy, an Afrocentric universe (See Figure 4).

The Survivalnomics Art Exhibit was a featured station at the Free Family Field Day at the ABC Field. For one day, we resurrect bases and run around to liberate the inner child. The event began with African tan tui, where a friend led a martial arts warm-up. During the welcoming, we acknowledged the ABC history and Survivalnomics activities implemented over the summer. As families visit the bases, they encounter soil play with bokashi (Asian composting), natural dyes with walnuts and flowers, and a folklore reading next to the art exhibit.

This was outdoor based, so a tent was available for the art exhibit in case of inclement weather. The exhibit embraced Afro-Indigenous practices and was an attempt to give the ancestors their flowers. Registration for 25 people sold out on Eventbrite, but only some of the core Survivalnomics families were present. We also started a registration list for a Spring 2025 semester of education programming.

Figure 4. Collage of Hartnett Farm, Field Day, and Survivalnomics art byproducts



The ABC collage in Figure 4 hints at how we represent the past today. Studying past tales, ancient expressions inform present and future plans. Reunions and social gatherings are key. This ABC Day collage is connected to the Afro-American folklore collage. Folklore is forever changing. From the Cadillac and braids, to Eddie Murphy, Harlem Renaissance, and the Great Migration, these past expressions inform how we should navigate to continue traditions for the culture and celebrate life. Agree to a social gathering for dirty dozens, entertainment, grow food, break bread, and share folklore. Capture live culture outside. From Sankofa to afro-futurism, past art informs and influences current motivations. In the past, the ABC field was known for baseball, family reunions, and nourishment in a safe space during Jim Crow. In 2024, we played kickball, provided food, and made space for our ancestral connections despite the encroaching gentrification.

What's Next for the Afro's Future?

My vision for an equitable future in agriculture holds space for afro-futurism. Future policies are anti-racist and rectify historical injustices that dispossessed and displaced Afro-Indigenous people. Policies protect nature and growers instead of extracting and exploiting human and natural resources. Environmental well-being is the way of life. When Original people are disconnected to the land, they disinherit themselves from the land. The near future openly embraces and credits Afro-Indigenous ecological knowledge, encouraging reciprocal relationships with nature. Intergenerational earth skills such as cordage, weaving, natural dyes and pigmentation, outdoor cooking, emergency first aid, folklore, and the like are prioritized as common knowledge for all ages. Nature crafts restore ethnobotany and community health.

In an equitable future, humanity returns to land and food sovereignty. Farming is free of racial violence and Indigenous nations reconnect to Land without hostility. Self-sufficiency and offerings to Nature are not regulated by code enforcement. People do not have to worry about lead in soil or radon and chlorine in their local creek. Environmental toxins around food and water are banned and highly fined. The scarcity mindset cannot prevail in abundant food forests as we are mindful to grow culturally relevant foods that nourished our ancestors. Heirloom seeds are required and Monsanto products have gone extinct. Instead of top-bottom dynamics, the common public are given power at decision making tables relating to their community. Land stewardship is self-regulated and required by communities. Marginalized groups are empowered to build sovereign food economics outside industrial systems. Afro-permaculture thrives. Decolonization is an active practice, not just a cringy word. People respect vital life sources, both water and the ant.

By the time I have published this, I have been Hartnett Farm Manager with WAWA since 2022 and Garden Educator for Spelman's Victory Garden since 2024. Environmental nonprofits should frequently check their operation style to ensure they are avoiding colonizer tactics. This can be an easy slip, a clandestine and mysterious assault, regardless of race, as we are all susceptible to grinding culture and resting when we are dead, ignoring the beauty and value in the present. It's easy to get caught up in buzzwords like sustainability, environmental justice, and land stewardship. Know your niche, and use your platform to support and supplement local small businesses. The whole point of Blacks reclaiming farming is to not repeat slavery. Pay farmers a living wage, so often companies take advantage of the low wage agriculture system of the Old

South. Considering this disarray, unease, and doubt of American politics in 2025, support for local farmers and small local businesses is needed now more than ever.

In conclusion, I did not make a new discovery. I simply borrowed and shared Afro-Indigenous ancestral hobbies relevant to my region. Afro-American folklore offers richness that Roblox cannot. If we slow down and put away our technology, we still desire to connect to our past. I sowed mental seeds to ground urban youth with cultural and functional art. Afro-Indigenous Environmental Art Education is one way folklore and nature crafts can rejuvenate Afro-Indigenous identities. There's hope for the Afros. Afro Ag intends to travel for cultural exchanges like afro-permaculture, fiber art, herbalism, and general adventure. Folklore remains a secret ingredient, often protected, passed down, and for those who are part of the culture from which the folklore is produced! It resonates like Crank That Soulja Boy in 2007. The informal stands out!

What did this CSAW experience help me see differently? I tackled a two-year assignment to express meaningful environmentally and racially conscious work in Atlanta, GA. I was encouraged to be meticulously detailed, meet academic standards, and reflect on intention. There was pressure to colonize with the IRB, but now I can better articulate my love for folklore and daily phenomena injustices in my community.

Dr. Constance Bailey's folklore class was mighty enlightening and Dr. Freshour's urban political ecology class helped expose decolonization. Folklore passed along the Middle Passage and succeeded as a modern memory through cinema. Cultural transmissions. What is Blackness as an ontology? The Afro has a way of being that is metaphysical when distractions are not present.

While creative expressions are abundant, the safe spaces are often sparse. It is a beautiful thing to hold space for humanity and cultural specialities.

Graduate school was strategic to build my business and grow my intellectual work, but my nature based teachings were in motion before and will remain after publishing the thesis. Afro Agriculture LLC continues to share life skills, relating to land and culture, for historically marginalized communities. Survivalnomics is rephrased as Earthskills today. Culturally affirming interactions with Land and culture can recenter pride in Indigenous crafts and radically imagine the afro's future. Walk outside and let nature inspire you. I take this work seriously as an academic and also an entrepreneur. I have work to do. An Afrocentric forest school is not going to create itself.

This is not a theoretical concept. This work is a lifestyle. Sharing nature curriculums is a significant career goal. Communication through art can make the world a more relatable place. Homeschooling is an alternative expression of creativity and lifestyle. Maroon influences may be the future in the wake of post-covid and failing public schools. Public school can be unhinged with peer pressure to skip school and care less about learning. School is legal youth jobs with limited benefits, and can be awful when people don't care about learning or teaching. Often the content does not resonate and/or teachers are burnt out. I am a product of the under-resourced Clayton County public school system. Navigating from an HBCU to a minority serving institution, intentional cultural relevance remains an overlooked afterthought so my research highlights potential for transformative environmental education programs.

Brace self because folklore is a part of placekeeping. Feel less crazy talking to plants. Rest is resistance! Check the last time you touched soil, watched the clouds roll by, smell the roses, or just simply relaxed. Ask what Anansi would do when colonizer energy approaches you. Magic is a personal choice. Hoodoo is not necessarily bad for those who resisted against violations and attacks on the human spirit. Avoid historical amnesia. Keep telling stories. Folklore is every day. Life is short, what tall tales pass the time in your memory bank?

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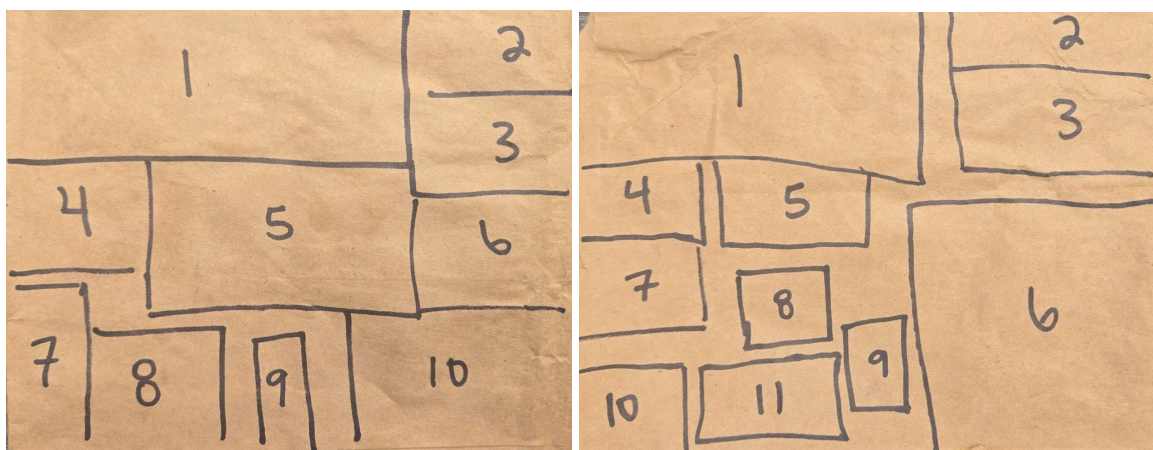
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Figure 3 Collage References



10-piece collage

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APPENDIX

Appendix A.1 Survivalnomics Lesson Plan

Survivalnomics 2024 Lesson Plan By IvoRi Schley of Afro Agriculture LLC

1. Consent

Objective: Registered families are introduced to the course details and expectations. Review the content overview, disclaimers, and the significance of the Survivalnomics workshop series

Materials: IRB manual, Ether by Simone Nofel

Audience: Metro Atlanta Black Homeschool Families, youth ages 7-14

Location: Hartnett Farm

ACTIVITY

1. Script:
 - a. “Welcome. These classes mainly involve survival crafts and folklore of the African diaspora. We will acknowledge Afro-American spirituality, magic, and Black history.
 - b. Disclaimer: Workshops involve jojoba oil on skin, Hoodoo conversations, fresh cotton, potentially picking cotton, using hammers, and using sharp needles.
 - c. Survival crafts are primarily sourced from nature, or very inexpensive local places, like Dollar General or Home Depot.
 - d. I will ask students survey questions at the beginning and end of each class to see if they learned something. I will also read 2-3 folktales per class.
 - e. Try to complete each project and share your thoughts about the workshop. Each student that attends all 6 workshops will be awarded a \$100 stipend.”
2. Make sure the entire audience has heard the script at least once. Next transition for diorama activity
3. Families create their ideal greenspace using items across the farm June 2024. After 20 minutes, show and tell!

2. Cordage

Objective: Learners will discover the hidden potential of plant fiber. Consider texture, plant goo,

and remnants of plant cell walls. Minimize gossip with Mother in Law's Tongue.

Materials: 12 Yucca leaves, 12 Snake plant leaves, spoons, cutting board, AIR by Simone Nofel
(Optional: okra stem, sesame stem)

Audience: 12 Black youth ages 7-14

Location: Hartnett Farm

ACTIVITY

1. Read AIR by Simone Nofel
2. Introduce Hoodoo as creative resourcefulness across history. Plants are alive!
 - a. Make cordage bracelet, (reference Jeffrey Gottlieb)
3. Read variety of Folklore

3. Emergency First Aid

Objective: Students learn plant identification, build a first aid kit, and practice medical techniques for wilderness survival

Materials: Band-aids, bandages, antibiotic wipes, fanny packs, sporks

Audience: 12 Homeschool youth ages 7-14

Location: Hartnett Farm and Bush Mountain

Activity

1. Build a First Aid Kit
2. Plant Identification--Poisonous vs Edibles, Natives vs Invasives
3. Make a Clove hitch backboard
4. Read folklore

4. Dyes

Objective: Students will make shabbbori (or tie dye) shirts with fresh indigo leaves. We discuss slave crops and activate plant's healing powers in everyday items

Materials: cotton shirts, wooden clothespin, rubber bands, soda ash, ziploc bags, pickling salt, hammer, marigold flowers, indigo leaves, *Water* by Simone Nofel

Audience: urban, Atlanta black and brown youth ages 7-12

Location: Hartnett Farm

ACTIVITY

1. Read WATER by Simone Nofel and folktale

Dye procedures:

1. Add salt layer to a 1 gallon ziploc bag. Label bag by youth name.
2. Harvest *persicaria tinctoria* leaves, place in salt bag.
3. Dip shirts in soda ash water bucket
4. Tie shirts with rubber bands and clothespins.
5. Drop shirt in salt/indigo bag. Mash/pound for 30 minutes.
6. Dip in a vinegar water bucket.
7. Dry shirt away from direct sunlight.
8. Gentle handwash. Remove clips and bands. Enjoy!

5. Outdoor Cooking

Objective: Students harvest from the farm and practice gratitude for a fresh meal. Create a salad using naturally grown lettuce and tomatoes.

Materials: Hand Sanitizer, Child-friendly knives, cutting boards, salad dressing

Audience: 12 urban homeschool youth

Location: Hartnett Farm

ACTIVITY

1. Safety Check: Sharp knives and fire!
2. Choose one recipe depending on local ingredients
3. Read folklore while students eat

6. Weaving

Objective: Students will weave nature together as they listen to old stories. Students will understand the strength and importance of vines and animal hair.

Materials: potholder frame, various yarn colors from High Hog wool, hooks, Freestyle Folklore

Audience: Atlanta urban, black and brown youth ages 7-12

Location: Hartnett Farm

ACTIVITY

1. Read folktales
2. Weave stories into your work using cardboard loom

Weaving Procedures

1. Find the base of a cardboard box. Cut them into a standard size rectangle....
2. Cut 15 slits on the vertical ends (even number may work better)
3. Use a base color string for the warp foundation. Insert 15 strings parallel on the cardboard. Make sure there's leftover string.
4. Pick and Cut an arm's length colorful string as the weft. Slipknot the colorful string on a plastic needle to expedite the weaving process.
5. Consistently apply the over-under technique from one end to the other. After completing each row, push the weft row down.