



Gabrielle Civil's *Experiments in Joy* celebrates black feminist collaborations and solos in essays, letters, performance texts, scores, images, and more. Civil documents her work with *From the Hive*, *No. 1 Gold*, and *Call & Response*—whose collaborative *Call* inspired the title. The book also features her solo encounters with artists and writers, ancestors and audiences. Here you will find black girlhood, grief, ghosts, girls in their bedrooms, lots of books, dancing, reading, falling in love, fighting back, and flying.

TEACHING GUIDE

Experiments in Joy

by Gabrielle Civil

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Recommended Classes:

- Black Feminism
- Art & Activism
- Creative Writing
- Creative Non-Fiction
- Performance/ Performance Studies
- African-American/ Black Studies
- Women's & Gender Studies
- Pedagogy/ Radical Teaching
- Art + Academy Intersections
- Weird Books by Womxn
- Cultural Studies

Keywords:

Creative Non-fiction, Memoir, Creative Writing, Performance Studies, Performance Writing, Women's & Gender Studies, Black Studies, Literary Autobiography/ Experimental Memoir, Hybrid Writing, Belles Lettres, Black Joy, Black Lives Matter, Girlhood Studies, Black Girlhood Studies, Performance Art, Collaboration, Art & Activism, Queer Love, Black Sexuality, Black Ballet, Melvin Dixon, Vanishing Rooms, Community Art & the Academy, Black Experimental Art, Black Experimental Performance, Black Dance, Black Elders & Ghosts

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. What is joy in this book? How is it recognized, claimed and/ or forged?
2. What is collaboration in this book? What kinds of collaboration appear?
3. What forms of art or community are shared or generated through collaboration?
4. What role do girls play in this book? How does Civil characterize her own girlhood?
5. How does that girlhood compare/ contrast to the girlhoods of other people? to her own adulthood?

6. What is the significance of memory in this book? How do various people recall, remember, commemorate, or recover various experiences?
7. What is the significance of ancestors in this book? Where do ancestors appear and what impact do they have on Civil's understanding of herself, and the world?
8. What is the significance of teaching in this book? How does Civil's identity as a teacher relate to or interact with her identity as an artist, performer or woman?
9. How does this book illustrate call and response, a common pattern found in African-American music? Where do we see this dynamic in Civil's text, and what might it indicate about her ideas on collaboration?
10.) Which other books appear in this book? Where do books appear and what do they do for Civil and her collaborators?
11. How does this book navigate race, class, gender, and sexuality? How do people of various backgrounds relate to each other in this book? How do their relationships (and collaborations) confirm or defy expectations?
12. What is knowledge in this book? How is it constituted, form or transformed?
13. How does this book engage politics? Specifically, what strategies emerge from this book to negotiate or transform this political moment?
14. What is the significance of performance in this book? Which performances appear and how do they relate to each other? How does the book itself operate as a performance?

Possible Assignments:

- 1) Write an e-mail to someone with whom you've fallen out of touch. Explain to this person why and how this communication fell off and what returning to it can mean to you. See what links you can make to social systems and expectations at work in the world.
- 2) Perform a gesture of armor and protection (see pages 199-200 for an example) and then sit for fifteen minutes in a quiet place and connect with one of your ancestors. What messages did you receive? What surprised you in your exchange? Find a way to record the results.
- 3) Exchange a series of letters with a former romantic partner or love interest about a book, album, or art work that meant a lot to both of you. What new ideas emerge about this common text or about your relationship? How can art reflect or transform life?
- 4) Write a critical essay sparked from one of the discussion questions above.
- 5) Conduct an experiment in joy.