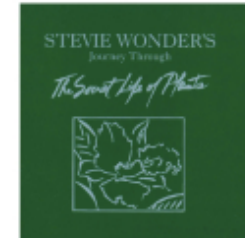


I remember the exact moment I was introduced to Stevie Wonder's album *Journey Through the Secret Life of Plants* (1979). I was instantly enthralled, as if he had created a gift just for me. Yet I knew Stevie had created something special for the whole world to receive. I thought, "A whole album dedicated to plants and gardens?" I was intrigued and drawn in by the music. Some songs were instrumental, illuminating the sounds one might imagine when watching plants grow. I remember closing my eyes and imagining what flowers would sound like as they grew tall—as they bloomed. Perhaps I connected to each track because my name, *Gholnecsar*, means "sharing flowers," and comes from Persian roots. I like to believe that we often become our names.



I was captivated by Stevie's intentional departure from more typical music with this album. I thought about the genius of artists who use their creative sensibilities to stretch beyond standards and the limitations of the mind—beyond practices that have become normalized. He didn't ask for permission to disrupt music standards of the time, nor was he motivated by album sales. He was, instead, motivated by humanity.

It is that humanity that gave the world (and me) the sounds, movements, and embodiment of plants, flowers, and growth. It was just what the world needed then and what it needs now.

When I listen to each chord and each sound, it feels like joy. And not joy that is merely celebratory or fun, but joy that brings calm and ease—joy that radiates peace. I feel beauty, and my senses experience the aesthetics of a world that sometimes moves so quickly that we humans forget to pause and observe. I feel the earth and humanity at the same time, intertwined.

A NOTE ON LAYERED PLAYLISTS

Unearthing Joy's introduction and each of its chapters begin with a “layered playlist.” The songs on each list are intended to be played softly in the background, as you take in the words. Music is special and has a way of helping us to understand a complex world. Each playlist is not meant to be exhaustive nor definitive, but rather connects to the meaning of the book’s content—and you should decide on a version of each song that gives you comfort and joy.

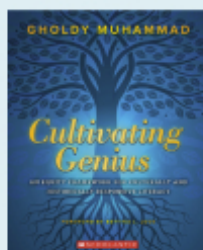
As I write this introduction, I am listening to “Black Orchid,” which Stevie Wonder wrote for the soundtrack of a documentary film he couldn’t physically see, yet with each track, one could feel his understanding of the beauty of plants on earth. “Black Orchid’s” opening lines remind us of a “a new way waiting to be born, in a world with need for change.” In the next line, Stevie Wonder juxtaposes love and hate, and the force of wind that is “asked to wait.” I listen to those words over and over and think of the state of education and a new direction for our children. That new way, I argue, is culturally and historically responsive education (CHRE).

Revisiting Genius

In my previous book, *Cultivating Genius*, I used *literacy* and *education* synonymously to detail that new way of teaching and learning, which is grounded in and

responsive to the histories, identities, literacies, and liberation of children and the social world. I listened to teachers who often said to me: “I understand the need for and meaning of identity, justice, and equity, but what does it look like in a lesson or unit plan, given the constraints and mandates I’m facing, such as test prep in my district?”

Because *Unearthing Joy* picks up where *Cultivating Genius* left off and extends the ideas in it, I recommend reading that book before you read this one.



I also listened to children who expect something more from us—they want a better world and expect schools to help them build it. They seek a radical departure from education that ignores or reproduces hurt and harm to society and self. In *Cultivating Genius*, I asked educators to return to brilliant, loving, justice-centered ideologies, and past pursuits of learning and themes of teaching that have been forgotten, hidden, or erased. Dr. Cynthia Dillard (2022) names that shift as the act of (re)membering, which means going back (and back again) to the historical brilliance of the past to better understand and (re)write education today. (Re)membering is a recursive process of writing and rewriting systems, frameworks, and practices. *Cultivating Genius* is a book that moves toward this (re)membering, (re)covering, and (re)writing. To understand equity, justice, and excellence, we must (re)member the triumphs, leaders, and ancestral genius that were rarely taught in teacher preparation programs.

I define *genius* as knowing who we are and *whose* we are—knowing social-emotional intelligence and knowing how to make ourselves smile. Joy is the embodiment of sustained happiness and having knowledge of the world—centering wellness and the gifts that may or may not be captured in traditional school assessments. Conventionally, *genius* is a word that has been applied to a few among us who took one IQ test that was initially developed within a system of marginalization and misrepresentation of children. Asa Hilliard, who remains a leading thinker and cultivator of education, once said:

I have never encountered any children in any group who are not geniuses. There is no mystery on how to teach them. The first thing you do is treat them as human beings and the second thing you do is love them (Watson-Vandiver & Wiggan, 2021).

I have never met a child without genius, but I

have met children who come to my classroom feeling discouraged by past teachers who have focused on failure rather than growth.

Hilliard expressed that belief regardless of what we know or *think we know* about children. If we do not center their gifts, we should not be the ones to teach them. For so long, children have had their stories told from deficit perspectives. They have been identified for what they “can’t” do instead of for who they truly are and what they are truly capable of. In fact, many professional books are written in the context of “children and failure.” If we are not centering children’s humanity through love, there is no strategy, no professional book or instructional method in the world that can prepare the teacher to elevate the child.

When we fail to begin with genius, we risk what Chimamanda Ngozi Adichie (2009) calls “the danger

of a single story,” which robs families of their dignity and breaks their spirit. For example, she explains that if children continue to hear negative labels or comments spoken about them, they can begin to internalize such negativity and see themselves in deficit ways—this breaks the spirit and joy of so many children and can make them feel worthless. I have never met a child without genius, but I have met children who come to my classroom feeling discouraged by past teachers who have focused on failure rather than growth.

One of the United States’ platforms to measure “growth” and “failure,” the National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP), also known as the Nation’s Report Card, provides data on fourth, eighth, and twelfth graders’ performance in reading and mathematics. Year after year, results indicate that the United States struggles to educate our children, especially Black children (who we

fail the most, according to NAEP). For example, data from 2022 shows that 33 percent of all fourth graders were proficient or advanced in reading, and 37 percent were in mathematics. The reading scores show a decrease of 2 percent from 2019 and the math scores show a decrease of 4 percent, both years very low (U.S. Department of Education, 2022).

Proficiency in reading is defined as being able to integrate and interpret texts and to apply understandings of the text to draw conclusions and make evaluations—but not necessarily within the context of the real world. Proficiency in mathematics means being able to solve problems by applying integrated procedural knowledge and conceptual understanding—but, again, not necessarily real-world problems connected to the experiences of children, particularly diverse children. What this data tells me is that the educational system

is building mostly basic levels of understanding, not proficient or advanced. It also reminds me of *the data we still fail to collect*—such as equity data on identity, consciousness, or joy. We are not fully capturing the genius of students.

In the same year, the data showed that just 17 percent of Black fourth graders were proficient or advanced in reading and 15 percent in math. If those percentages are true, the nation should be outraged. But instead, we have people fighting to create laws and policies that prohibit the teaching of Black identity and Black justice in schools. *Do those people fail to see Black children as their own children?* If we are one nation, why aren't we all seeing the 17 percent and 15 percent as our own humanity?

There needs to be a dismantling of systems and curricula, and a (re)building of them that is grounded in the genius of our teachers and our

students.

The othering of children still exists. Perhaps if those people viewed Black children as a part of their own people, maybe their laws and policies would uphold love, compassion, and anti-racism, rather than erasure.

The NAEP data also begs the question, do we have 17 percent reading proficiency of Black children, or do we have an educational system and literacy curriculum that responds to only 17 percent of Black children? Which one needs the “intervention” or “remediation,” *the child or the system*? Which one needs reparations? I argue that traditional intervention and remediation have never widely helped children, especially those whose people have oppressive histories, because it is not the child who needs the intervention or remediation. It is the system and the curriculum that needs reparations. There needs to be

a dismantling of systems and curricula, and a (re)building of them that is grounded in the genius of our teachers and our students. We only (re)build when we look back and (re)member history.

In *Cultivating Genius*, I asked, *how do we use the genius of the past to better educate the children of today?* I focused on the intellectual feasts and strivings of members of Black literary societies that gave us a guide—a road map—to improving education today. Members of those societies awakened and activated genius already inside of them. They used the word *genius* to name themselves in a world that didn't recognize their brilliance, purpose, or gifts.

In *Cultivating Genius*, I outlined four pursuits in education that moved beyond teaching skills only—skills disconnected from students' identities and world. I used *pursuit*, a word derived directly from African American

ancestors, to denote the self-driven, purposeful practices designed to elevate children and humanity. I intentionally did not use *standard* because a standard is created by others and limits learning. Standards have a ceiling or stopping point, while pursuits continue throughout one's life.

1. **Identity Development:** Helping students to make sense of who they are and to learn about diverse cultural lives and identities of others.
2. **Skills Development:** Helping students to develop proficiencies across the content areas and state learning standards.
3. **Intellectual Development:** Helping students to gain new knowledge that connects to the

context of the world where they can apply the skills and standards.

4. **Criticality Development:** Helping students to name, understand, question, and disrupt oppression (hurt, pain, and harm) in the world and within the self, and to work to make the world a better place.

These pursuits invite us to teach beyond traditional textbooks and worksheets alone, or teaching that is rote, prescriptive, and purely standardized test-driven. They enable students to see purpose and authentic meaning in their lives—past, present, and future. Once students begin to understand their purpose, they see the skills they learn as meaningful in the real world. Collectively, the pursuits are a new vision in education that name all content

areas—not just social studies and English language arts—as humanities. This model invites us all to teach and learn with the goal of seeing the norm of our work as humanities. This means that within each classroom, we ask, *How can our content areas help children grow to be more humane and contribute to the earth?*

Joy is the ultimate goal of teaching and learning, not test prep or graduation.

Introducing Joy!

In *Unearthing Joy*, I build upon the model in *Cultivating Genius* by adding the pursuit of joy—helping students to uplift beauty, aesthetics, truth, ease, wonder, wellness, solutions to the problems of the world, and personal fulfillment. Joy is the ultimate goal of teaching and learning, not test prep or graduation. Before writing

Cultivating Genius, I assumed all educators, teachers, and administrators were building up to joy in their practices. In 2020, in the midst of a global pandemic and racial uprising, and the failure by many leaders to recognize the strength and pain of teachers and children, I realized that we needed joy more than ever. At the same time, with certain pressures on hold temporarily, educators started (re)claiming the joy and beauty of their pedagogy. They started to explore their creative sensibilities and bring more joy into the virtual classroom. We only get to learning and experiencing joy when we have an intentional and authentic purpose to dismantle oppression (again hurt, pain, or harm) in the classroom through criticality.

In *Unearthing Joy*, I also provide educators and those involved in teaching, learning, and leading the processes and tools for cultivating genius and joy. I call the book

a “guide to teaching and learning” to address education through multiple spaces and realms in our lives, especially PreK–12 and higher education. My goal is to put history and theory into action in classroom practices that are exhilarating for students, parents, educators, and all those working for diversity, equity, and inclusion.

I don’t think it’s by chance that the word *human* is rooted in the Latin word *humus*, which means earth or ground. There is a connection between humanity and the growth of the earth. To engage in humanizing practices, we must return to the earth, return to the land.

We must unearth.

To unearth means to dig into the ground and bring excellence to light—to the sun. Unearthing requires digging, mining, and uprooting, and, ultimately, bringing

genius to the surface—again, to the sun, revealing what has been pushed down and concealed. We must draw forth pedagogies of equity and excellence, moving students toward *the sun* (where they belong)—moving students and educators to genius and joy. The prefix of *un-* means to reverse, and I argue in this book that there is much in education to reverse.

Just as flowers are beautiful, children are genius. We don't give a flower its beauty. It is beautiful because that's its nature. In much the same way, we don't give children their genius. It is already there. Like flowers, children are destined for beauty and growth. They are the flowers. When a flower does not grow, we don't uproot it. Instead, we change the amount of sunlight and water, we change the type of soil, we nourish it. We look for solutions that will facilitate its growth. However, we teach Black children today in ways that uproot them from their histories and

lineages, and from Black studies. The ways Black ancestors practiced math, science, and literacy are not used to teach Black children today. And then when they don't "grow," as they are destined to do, folks wonder why—and often begin to blame and punish others. Yet, when students do not "grow," it is because their roots have been removed from the rich soil of their existence. They have been deprived of the sunlight they need to bloom. If systems, structures, and practices were developed with the genius of diverse children in mind, we would see immense growth.

We have been watering some children's futures and not others. Can you imagine if the sun shined only on some of our children and not others? To say that only some students are genius implies the sun shines only for them. In our educational system, we dangerously plan for some students to succeed—to *see the sun*—and others to fail.

We have given attention, care, and nurturing to some children and neglected others. But the sun is too massive and ubiquitous to say that some students should not be centered and honored in learning. The growth of a “flower” calls for work from the educator—the one who is nurturing the flower to grow. It calls for us to cultivate—which is a social action and responsibility. We are the ones who care for the flowers. We are the ones who water their genius.

Advancing the state of humanity, moving toward cultivation, calls for what Stevie Wonder sings about as “the promises of rain.”

The rain, the water, the water to the earth.

But how can we water an earth that systemic racism and oppression have made dry?

This is the question that motivated me to write this book—and led to other questions that I asked myself as I wrote:

The growth of a “flower” calls for work from the educator—the one who is nurturing the flower to grow. It calls for us to cultivate—which is a social action and responsibility.

- *What does the water look like?*
- *How is water the joy for the barren lands of education?*
- *Why has our educational system remained dry—unchanged—for so long?*
- *How do we dismantle and reconstruct centuries of practices that have not served all children well, that have destroyed the futures of youth, especially*

Black, Brown, and Indigenous children—practices that allow only some students to see the sun and not others?

- *Why are some textbooks so dry and disengaging?*
- *How do we cultivate not only the genius of students and educators, but also their joy?*
- *How do we begin to unearth and teach to the humanity of students and to the sustainability of the world?*
- *How can watering and unearthing be symbolic in the pursuit for creating an educational system—serving to disrupt harm and build a society that feels more human?*

- *How can we create systems, structures, and processes to ensure the growth of those we have failed the most in this country?*

The water is a special part of *Unearthing Joy*. In assuming the role of the waterer, we must recognize that water can be not only beneficial and helpful but also destructive and violent. We must be careful about the amount we use to water the genius of children. We must water to restore systems, schools, and classrooms.

Water has always played a special role in my life. I have a mother who believes a lack of water is the reason for any problem—ever. *If I had a bad day, if I tripped and fell, or if I simply didn't remember something, she told me I hadn't drunk enough water and if I had, those things certainly would not have happened.* Water nourishes. Also, when it rains, I always feel a new day is coming—a new beginning.

Water renews. If we take the symbolic meaning of water across cultures, we learn that water is life-giving, and provides clarity and refreshment. Water is fertile.

When it rains, I always feel a new day is coming—a new beginning. Water renews.

I am reminded of the importance water had to Black and Indigenous ancestors. For example, in “The Negro Speaks of Rivers,” Langston Hughes connects the natural flow of water to the growth and connections of various civilizations throughout history: “My soul has grown deep like the rivers,” interrupting the misconception of Blackness as a monolith. In his writing, he describes the omnipresence of Blackness, moving across humanity and civilizations. Anna Julia Cooper connected water to the work of our ancestors as they “watered the soil” and to her identity as a Black woman, in *A Voice from the South*:

I speak for the colored women of the South, because it is there that the millions of blacks in this country have watered the soil with blood and tears, and it is there too that the colored woman of America has made her characteristic history and there her destiny is evolving.

Black women have represented the water of culturally responsive education and have given us the model of how to advance curriculum, instruction, and leadership.

It is the water that makes us evolve. Bearing resemblance to Hughes and Cooper, in *Darkwater: Voices from Within the Veil*, W. E. B. Du Bois (1920) lifts the darker race by truth-telling about oppressive harms in the world, through carefully crafted essays on race and justice. He speaks of the “promises of rain” and education by stressing the need to unearth genius and joy, such as in this passage:

Especially do I believe in the Negro Race: in the beauty of its genius, the sweetness of its soul, and its strength in that meekness which shall yet inherit this turbulent earth.

I believe in the Training of Children, black even as white; the leading out of little souls into green pastures and beside the still waters, not for pelf or peace, but for life lit by some large vision of beauty and goodness and truth.... (pp. 1–2).

Du Bois calls attention to the problems inflicting the earth and those we have neglected—and encourages us to view Blackness as a model and way forward for our children. Similarly, in examples of Indigenous cultures, water has signified strength, change, healing, and love (Dunbar-Ortiz, Mendoza, & Reese, 2019; Gilio-Whitaker, 2019). Water can be promise.

A Call for Humanizing Pedagogies

We need humanizing pedagogies that center the genius, justice, joy, love, and humanity of our children. That means we must *search for and unearth ourselves* and search for people, places, things, histories, movements, events, and moments that we have failed to teach because we didn't learn them ourselves. We can no longer have *hidden figures*. We must uncover them because we need their genius and their narratives to make us all better. The stories we teach matter, and in this book, I outline how we get to the genius and joy through curricular art and curricular stories of teaching and learning.

Drawing upon the gifts that ancestors and artists have given to the earth, I view the educator as the waterer—the cultivator—the *unearther*—the artist—the sculptor—the innovator—the songwriter—the storyteller—the

designer of curriculum. I take educators (teachers, leaders, and other curriculum developers) through the practice of *unearthing*. When one unearths genius and joy, one creates a legacy by imprinting into the minds and hearts of children.

We can no longer have hidden figures. We must uncover them because we need their genius and their narratives to make us all better.

Chapter 1: Unearthing the Need for Genius and Joy In this chapter, I outline both the historical triumphs and the problems of systemic structures that have led us to education as we see it today. To understand education, we must study the history and the lingering effects it has. Specifically, I look at the roots and intersecting parts of a problematic system to justify the need to cultivate genius and unearth joy. I question why problems of the past

continue today and call for new policies and practices to replace those in need of replanting. I lay out culturally and historically responsive education as a way forward.

Chapter 2: Coming Into Joy In this chapter, I focus on the pursuit of joy through the culturally and historically responsive education model (CHRE Model) for teaching and learning. I define *joy* and the process of unearthing it in schools and classrooms. I unpack each of the pursuits of CHRE Model—identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy—with rich examples of how they show up in learning across grade levels and content areas. Additionally, I answer frequently asked questions about the pursuits to build your understanding of how to implement the model.

Chapter 3: Unearthing Self In this chapter, I suggest that the starting point of culturally and historically responsive education is centering the self and doing the self-work.

Educators cannot move to the pursuits of teaching identity, skills, intellectualism, criticality, or joy if they have not reflected upon and practiced the pursuits in their own lives. This chapter offers tools to do that work, while focusing on how to work with colleagues, parents, and community members who both support and resist culturally and historically responsive education.

Chapter 4: Redesigning Curriculum and Assessment In this chapter, I focus on how to design and implement instruction, and take you through a creative, step-by-step process. I include a set of practices and questions for guidance. I center the teacher as the artistic genius who creates meaningful and authentic learning experiences tailored to unique groups of students. In addition, I include tools for collecting equity data that go beyond traditional assessments for measuring children's reading or math levels alone. It is my hope that you will learn to

collect data related to identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy. I write about effective practices of CHRE assessment and help educators learn ways to review and evaluate school curriculum for the CHRE pursuits.

A Note on “CRE,” “CHRE,” and the HILL Model

Throughout *Unearthing Joy*, I use “CRE” to denote culturally relevant or responsive education. With “CHRE” (culturally and historically responsive education), I build upon CRE by taking the past into consideration, emphasizing people and events that have traditionally been ignored or misrepresented in schools.

The HILL Model is my instructional framework for CHRE, in which I name the five pursuits—identity, skills, intellect, criticality, and joy—because they respond to diverse students’ **H**istories, **I**dentities, **L**iteracies, and **L**iberation.

Chapters 5 and 6: Practical and Creative Uses of the HILL Model In these chapters, I provide practical applications of the CHRE Model across grade levels and content areas. I show how to teach the five pursuits through read-alouds, lessons and units, and literacy strategies, and to promote them through leadership approaches, family- and community-engagement strategies, and more. These applications showcase everyone involved in the system: students, teachers across the content areas, leaders, non-instructional staff, and parents, caregivers, and communities.

Chapter 7: Planting Seeds for the Future I conclude *Unearthing Joy* by highlighting the genius and joy of wonderful teachers across the world, who have not waited for or relied on anyone to provide what children have needed—teachers who have brought forth their excellence to ensure that children pursue identity, skills,

intellect, criticality, and joy. In the last three years, they have created spaces of joy on social media by sharing ideas, questioning practices, and pointing us to a new way forward. They are models of the “promises of rain.”

What You’ll Find Across Chapters

The chapters build upon one another and, collectively, provide a guide for developing and revising CHRE curriculum and instruction. My hope is that each chapter feels like “tracks” in a symphony of word, poetry, and art on the page. If curriculum is the stories we teach and tell, this book helps you to name and justify which “stories” are worthwhile, while highlighting examples from schools. Instruction is how we share, experience, learn, and teach the stories. Often, we understand theoretically the need for equity and justice, but struggle with what it looks like in practice or where to begin. *Unearthing Joy* is a guide toward genius curriculum and instruction. I hope reading

it is a multimodal experience of learning, reflection, and (re)membering.

*My hope is that each chapter feels like “tracks”
in a symphony of word, poetry, and art on the
page.*

The chapters begin with a set of “Unearthing Thought” questions that can be used for book clubs, literary societies, or self-reflection. Throughout chapters, I sprinkle in primary source documents to support my ideas because I appreciate the clarity that history offers. Each chapter is layered with art, poetry, music, and other textual content to elevate meaning, reflection, and joy. It also contains artwork, a musical playlist, and spaces for writing, coloring, and drawing out your own takeaways and meanings. My intention is for you to listen to the songs on the playlists (perhaps softly in the background) while reading, to heighten your understanding and

joy. You may want to consider studying and discussing the songs’ lyrics with colleagues, through the lens of teaching and learning. This intertextuality also helps with theoretical and practical learning. Readers may choose to study the meanings of the lyrics and connect the lyrics to the meanings held within the book. This book is intended to be read with ease, while provoking deep thought.

In addition to playlists of songs, I include a coloring page at the end of this introduction and each chapter to give you a purpose to pause and breathe for calm and joy. Coloring helps to connect the mind and heart, while returning us to childlike play and imagination. I suggest using colored pencils or fine-tip markers. (When using markers or pens on these pages, allow time for the ink to dry before touching the page or closing the book.)

I hope you leave *Unearthing Joy* with a greater sense of lessons, units, assessments, and other practical tools that you can use immediately with students—whether you teach young children; elementary, middle, or high school students; or adult learners or preservice teachers in formal or informal settings. I hope you feel me speaking to you as your partner in education—or as if we’re two colleagues in conversation about the need for joy and justice in teaching and learning.

I write autobiographically throughout the book, sharing years of listening to people and being in awe of the earth. You may notice at times that I use the collective pronoun, *we*, because I don’t do this work alone. I do it in the spirit of so many ancestors, children, teachers, and guides of the past, present, and future. My approach is inspired by an African philosophy called the *zamani* dimension, which means space of being and presence that is unconsciously,

intuitively, or spiritually influenced by epistemologies and teachings of ancestral genius. It is my hope that readers today will become the ancestral legacies of the future.

I asked Pharrell Williams to open the book because so many of us are inspired by his artistry—by the way he pushes his genius across boundaries and the cosmos. When I first met Pharrell through his music, I found the five pursuits. I found elements of identity, a high level of skill, intellectualism, criticality and consciousness, and joy. When I observed Pharrell listen to his music, he closed his eyes as if he were experiencing joy—perhaps embodying the full earth of his artistry. It was beautiful. The way he looked when he created music is the way I look when I create curriculum. We are kindred souls in our artistry. It was a special gift for Pharrell to write the opening of this book—a text that is grounded in education as an art form.

I end the book much how I begin it, with the musical and theoretical musing of Stevie Wonder because he has offered genius and joy to help us all become better educators. He is certainly a gift to the earth. It is my splendid hope that *Unearthing Joy* is yet another gift to the earth.

I end this introduction by (re)membering and (re)visiting the words of Alice Walker:

The Nature of This Flower Is to Bloom

Rebellious. Living.

Against the Elemental Crush.

A Song of Color

Blooming

For Deserving Eyes.

Blooming Gloriously

For its Self.

Revolutionary Petunia.

Our students are flowers who desire natural growth and the promises of the rain. They seek a rebellious bloom against control, authority, and convention that have not served them well, nor prepared them for the world—and the “elemental crush” of society that has not always centered their genius, and has instead focused on what they are not, or what they can’t do. Yet, they grow and desire environments that nurture their growth.

Our students are a *Song of Color* and beauty. They are “Blooming,” but only for those of “deserving eyes”—those who deserve to be in the presence of their greatness. Not every educator will deserve the privilege of teaching the next generation of leaders. But it is with hope that we prepare ourselves to do so.

Alice Walker states that the flower blooms gloriously for itself. The purpose of education is not to win prizes

or to compete with others. It is not for one community to have more than another. The **purpose** of education is not to bolster our egos, but to ensure that students feel self-empowered, self-reliant, self-determined, and self-liberated. Education is for our students, not us. It is essential to center their voices, genius, and perspectives. For they are the “revolutionary petunias” or perhaps the “black orchids” who thrive vigorously, “gloriously,” and

vividly on the landscape of the beautiful earth. It is this harvest that will yield an education that is celebratory.

All I want to do is listen to the rain and watch the flowers grow.

—GHOLDY MUHAMMAD

Reflection

Select one or more questions to engage in a freewrite.

- What are some reactions and reflections you have about the music, art, and text from this introduction?
- What ideas and passages stand out for you and why?
- What parts do you want to explore and learn about more?
- What parts of the educational system have helped you to grow?
- What parts of the educational system are in need of water?
- What do you plan to do to unearth genius and joy?