

# harlem is... Healing Dialogue Series

## CURRICULUM GUIDE

November 2022 Edition



### INTRODUCTION

This curriculum guide for the **harlem is...Healing Dialogue Series** provides discussion prompts for each video episode and a list of extended learning activities. We encourage educators and group leaders to use this series to foster rich conversations about individual and collective healing in your own local communities. Our aim is to inspire the resilient spirit in all of us as we move through these uncertain times. You can find 50 more stories of amazing individuals making a difference in their communities on our website's **harlem is...healing Celebrating Heroes of the Pandemic** page at <https://www.harlem-is.org/harlem-heroes>.

As new episodes of the Healing Dialogue Series are produced, we will update this guide with new discussion prompts generated from those conversations. We hope these stories motivate you to be a part of the change you wish to see in your community as we celebrate the local heroes of the pandemic here in Harlem.

**Make sure to subscribe to our new Harlem Is...youtube page here:**  
[www.youtube.com/harlemis](http://www.youtube.com/harlemis)

For more information on the harlem is.. Healing program which honors 45 community artists, activists, and healers - and to learn more about Harlem's rich cultural history, visit us at [www.Harlem-is.org](http://www.Harlem-is.org) or email us at [Bh@communityworksnyc.org](mailto:Bh@communityworksnyc.org). Special thanks to our key funders: Con Edison, Humanities NYC, and Josh Horowitz. This curriculum was written by Deirdre Hollman.

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## PART 1: EPISODE OVERVIEWS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

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**EP11: IN CONVERSATION** - Restaurateur of Melba's in Harlem and President of The New York Hospitality Alliance Melba Wilson in Conversation with Musa Jackson, Founder of Ambassador Digital Magazine, Producer and Writer

Two friends, born and bred Harlemites Musa Jackson, Harlem ambassador, producer and writer, with Melba Wilson, the larger than life chef and founder of world known restaurant Melba's in a joyous conversation that follows Melba, known lovingly as the 'Queen of Southern Comfort Food'. This intimate conversation covers her loving recollections of growing up in Harlem to her time working with her aunt at Sylvia's to her rise as president of New York Hospitality Alliance, to her tremendous contribution to serving the hungry during the pandemic and her role in keeping restaurants alive from take out deliveries food to the birth of outdoor seating.

### *Discussion Prompts:*

- This interview opens with childhood recollections of the meaning and feeling of community from Melba Wilson's childhood. When you think about your childhood community, what are the experiences that define the essence of what community meant to you growing up in your hometown?
- Melba Wilson is known as "The Queen of Southern Comfort Food" and she tells the story of her grandmother picking food from her farm garden and bringing the bounty into the kitchen to make magic that would feed the family. In your experience, how does food play a part in grounding and uniting families and communities?
- Melba speaks of her journey to open her own restaurant by naming and honoring the iconic family restaurateurs that she learned from like Sylvia Woods. Can you identify the family restaurants in your neighborhood that are cornerstones to your community's history?
- The pandemic hit the hospitality industry very hard as restaurants were forced to close during the lockdown. As Melba discusses, many service workers were hit hard by the loss of work and needed support. How did Melba and other leaders in the

restaurant community pivot their energy to support their workers and their communities at large during this dark and uncertain time? What did you witness in your own neighborhood that mirrors what Melba was able to do in Harlem?

- When you listen to Melba’s multifaceted pandemic response, what do you take away from her testimony that teaches us how people can work together to heal their communities?
- Dialogues like these, the Harlem Is Healing Dialogue Series, help us learn from changemakers in our neighborhoods about the work that is happening to build, heal, and strengthen our communities. These stories are not often told in the mainstream media. What can you do to amplify these local heroes and their stories using the tools available to you in your community?
- In the end, Melba says she feeds souls for a living? What does that phrase, “feeding souls” mean to you in the spirit of community healing?

### **EP10: IN CONVERSATION - Theater Artist Stephanie Berry with Co-Founder, Harlem Mothers S.A.V.E., Jackie Rowe-Adams**

In this not to be forgotten emotional interview conducted by artist and educator Stephanie Berry, Jackie Rowe-Adams, Founder of Harlem Mothers S.A.V.E. takes us on her roller coaster journey, establishing the organization following the death by gun violence of two sons. Founded in 2006, it continues now to provide youth programs, rallies and marches, bereavement services and compassionate support. In this powerful dialogue, hear about the monthly bereavement sessions conducted by Jackie Rowe-Adams. Through sharing and tears and laughter these women who have lost a child to gun violence come together and bond and find that they are not alone.

#### *Discussion Prompts:*

- Harlem Mothers S.A.V.E. is an organization that supports families through the grief of losing children to gun violence. In your experience, how does the issue of gun violence impact community health and healing?
- The early aims of Harlem Mothers S.A.V.E. was education and prevention. They partnered with city officials and law enforcement to begin their campaign work to reduce the circulation of firearms. Discuss how education and prevention are essential components of anti-violence work in communities.
- This organization grew from 5 mothers to 55 mothers and fathers in ten years. How is this growth a positive reflection of community organizing and also a sad reflection of the lasting crisis of gun violence?

- Ms. Rowe-Adams turned her grief into activism to address the circulation of firearms in communities and specifically among school aged children. How is this focus on youth important to community wellness?
- “I am sick and tired of being sick and tired.” This is a famous quote by civil rights activist Fannie Lou Hammer. Ms. Rowe-Adams used the line in the interview. What do these words mean to you today as we heal from the pandemic?
- Ms. Berry talks about the healing power of joy and sorrow together. Why is this important? How can communities address both in their healing initiatives?

### **EP9: IN CONVERSATION - Clinical Psychologist Dr. John Palmer with Executive Director of the Hope Center, Dr. Lena Green**

In this Harlem Is...Healing dialogue, Meet the inspirational Dr. Lena Green, clinical psychologist, social worker, and Director of the Hope Center. Her dedication and meaningful work provides free mental health and wellness services to meet the needs of the Harlem community recovering from the ills of the pandemic and social justice turmoil. In this conversation fellow clinician Dr. John Palmer explores Dr. Green's work and passion for helping her community. Dr. Lena Green discusses the urgent need to provide mental health services for teens, dealing with the rising suicide rate, school issues and trauma. Their Thrive initiative provides a 12 week program for youth dealing with issues of resilience.

#### *Discussion Prompts:*

- Have you thought about mental health services as a key part of community wellness? Why do you think mental health services are important to healing communities?
- Dr. Green discusses how the Hope Center pivoted during the pandemic to telehealth and digital services via zoom. How do you think technology and social networks can be used creatively to reach more people in your community with mental health services?
- There are so many specialized audiences served by the Hope Center - new mothers, men, teens, lgbtq persons, seniors, etc. Discuss the specific mental health and wellness needed by these different groups and think about what special audiences need support in your neighborhood.
- Most people think about mental health services as crisis management more than they think about it as a way to reduce stress and help people cope with life's ups and downs. Why is it important to think about healing communities during a crisis, like the pandemic, and sustaining that care through ongoing wellness services?

- How have depression, anxiety, grief, and loss permeated your community during the pandemic?
- What types of mental health services do the youth in your neighborhood need to support their ability to be resilient during traumatic events and crises?
- Think about the cross-community partnerships between mental health service organizations, hospitals, religious institutions, universities, and corporations. Why are these networks important to community healing? Where do you see these wellness networks in your community?
- Dr. Green talks about daily activities she engages in for self-preservation and wellness during the pandemic. What do you do for the preservation of your mental health? How can organizations like HOPE be seen as doing the work of community preservation?

**EP8: IN CONVERSATION - Host/Educator & Cultural Producer Deirdre Hollman with Managing Director, Impact Repertory Theatre Dietrice Bolden**

In this Harlem Is...Healing dialogue, performer and cultural leader Dietrice Bolden reflects in conversation with noted educator Deirdre Hollman on the powerful impact Harlem has had on her, from school and church to family, and her 25 year journey from student to Managing Director of Impact Repertory Theatre. Dietrice shares the important ways Impact has made a difference even during the height of the pandemic, from providing food to those in need, creating a series of musical performances that encouraged community healing and promoting voter registration, all in line with supporting Impact's ethos of giving young people voice and agency in the community. Not only is Dietrice Bolden the inspirational leader of IMPACT Repertory Theatre, but an extraordinary artist in her own right. Stay tuned until the end of the dialogue for a very special musical moment!

*Discussion Prompts:*

- Deirdre opens the interview asking Dietrice, "What does Harlem mean to you?". Reflect on the character of your home town or city and all the people, places, and things that make it a special place for you. Answer the same question: *What does your town mean to you?*
- What are the spaces and places in your community that pour into young people in the performing arts? What role do community art, theater, dance and music programs play in the cultural development of your neighborhood?
- Reflect on the mentors that you may have had as a teenager. What did you learn about yourself and your potential through the encouragement of your mentor? How important are mentors to the fabric of a community?

- How did your community come together during the pandemic? How did you witness fellowship among your neighbors and mutual aid services supporting families in need? What groups or individuals in your neighborhood took leadership in this arena? What innovative responses did you see from ordinary folks helping one another?
- Mental health and wellness is an enduring concern for youth and many adults in our communities as we cope with the losses and changes to our daily lives since the pandemic. Some call it PTSD, *post-traumatic stress disorder*, others refer to it as *persistent-traumatic stress disorder* (due to the ongoing examples of tragic violence that unfold in society daily). Share your thoughts about the mental health challenges in your community and how being in community can provide a layer of support for people.
- What proverbs or sayings do you hold close to your heart to get you through challenging times?
- What new programs or support systems need to be developed in your community to continue to build strength and healing for youth and families into the future?
- What is your hope for your community as it continues its healing journey post-covid and beyond? What role can the arts play in achieving that dream?

### **EP7: IN CONVERSATION - Journalist Clem Richardson with President/CEO, Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce Lloyd A. Williams**

In this Harlem Is...Healing dialogue, President and CEO of the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce Lloyd A. Williams, who has dedicated his life to the revitalization of his community, discusses with journalist Clem Richardson the magical kingdom that is Harlem and its continuing vital role as the black capital of America. Mr. Williams reflects on the tragic losses and disproportionate effects of the pandemic on his beloved community, Harlem. He draws strength from the words of Maya Angelou and reminds us that historically the remarkable resilience Harlemites have shown throughout time ensures that “we’re coming back and we shall rise.” Now this visionary community leader strives to pass the lessons of his mentors, Percy Sutton and Malcolm X, to the next generation.

#### *Discussion Prompts:*

- At the beginning of the dialogue, Mr. Williams shares that his family came to Harlem in 1919 (over 100 years ago) and he is a 6th generation citizen of Harlem, aka a Harlemite. How far back can you trace your family story to a particular community or city?

- Although Harlem is known around the world as the “Black Mecca” and the “Cultural Capital of Black America”, Harlem is a multiethnic and multicultural community. How does the cultural diversity of Harlem shape the character of the community? How does multiculturalism shape your town or neighborhood?
- As President and CEO of the Greater Harlem Chamber of Commerce, Lloyd A. Williams works to manifest economic and political solutions to community development and wellness. Can you identify the role economic development organizations play in community revitalization efforts in your neighborhood?
- “The business of business is people.” That’s the motto of the Harlem Chamber of Commerce. Discuss how Mr. Williams describes that this motto helps them serve the economic engine of a wide range of community services.
- Tourism is an interesting way to look at community development and sustainability. Discuss how tourism is a channel for historic preservation, economic growth, and gentrification.
- The greater Harlem area covers the area from 96th Street to 168th Street, and from the Harlem River to the Hudson River. How does that geography shape the way we think about the legacy of Harlem, and Harlem’s future?
- Many may agree with Mr. Williams’ thought that Harlem’s resilience over decades of struggle helped it respond to and survive the pandemic. What are your thoughts on community resilience?
- How do aspects of arts and culture, business, and education work together to bring about community healing?

**EP6: IN CONVERSATION - Host/Producer Rhina Valentin with Music & Culture Writer/Singer/Songwriter Aurora Flores**

Aurora Flores, cultural activist, renowned journalist, writer, singer and bandleader in conversation with dynamic TV host Rhina Valentin, reveals the essential need for and power of music and art to inspire and offer hope even during the height of the despair of the pandemic. Listen to Aurora’s passionate plea for us to know our history and to understand our responsibility in the struggle to achieve racial and economic equity in the community, especially at this crucial moment in our history.

*Discussion Prompts:*

- Rhina and Aurora open their conversation with a poignant discussion of the “*sense of displacement*” this era of Covid has brought to our once vibrant and highly connected lives? Can you reflect on how your lifestyle, work life, family life, and community activity has been “displaced” by the pandemic?

- Aurora’s discussion of the way that the community in Puerto Rico uplifted itself out of the aftermath of the earthquakes is powerful. What was your experience of community healing and mutual aid during the early and worst part of the pandemic?
- To lift her spirits and channel her creative energy toward healing in dark times, Aurora wrote a song with her brother, “Plena Corona de Aurora”. How does music help to console us during a crisis? What music did you listen to during those times to keep you going? Can you name popular songs that were written to help get people through tough events?
- “In bad times, good face” is the saying that Aurora remembered from her mother to keep her from being sad all the time. What cultural sayings or parables does your family share like this?
- Aurora also speaks about the political mantras and cultural beliefs that marked her understanding of the world and sent her on the path toward service. For example, John F. Kennedy’s “Ask not what your country can do for you. Ask what you can do for your country.” - and - “Three steps forward, two steps back.” How do you understand these sayings in the contexts of our times today?
- What are the local hope generating traditions in your community like Aurora’s Tree Lighting Event in East Harlem?
- **“We are not invisible!”** declares Aurora about the powerful presence of Puerto Ricans in New York since the 1920s. What are the ways in which ethnic and cultural histories shape the dynamism of your local community? Is there community tourism in your neighborhood?
- Aurora reminds us that a knowledge of our history will provide the blueprint for community healing that involves families, politicians, and artists working together. Do you agree?

**EP5: IN CONVERSATION - Arts Administrator/Cultural Advocate Michael Unthank with Founder & CEO, SoHarlem, Janet Rodriguez**

In an inspirational conversation conducted by cultural consultant Michael Unthank, Janet Rodriguez, cultural warrior, discusses her 40 year career as an advocate for racial and economic equity and her founding of SoHarlem, a design collective and cultural industries incubator. Her story illustrates how committed arts and culture advocates are essential to the work of healing communities by building sustainable opportunity into the economic development plans for neighborhoods. She teaches us how equity work, done well, can keep people creatively productive for generations.



*Discussion Prompts:*

- Janet opens her talk with this quote about the role of arts and culture and the development of Harlem: ***“You can’t just build buildings. Buildings don’t have souls. You need people and you need the arts.”*** Do you agree? What buildings in Harlem (or your community) have souls because of the life brought to them from the arts?
- What is community development? What is cultural development? How do these two activities work together?
- How does the partnership between artists, politicians, and philanthropists work to build sustainable arts and cultural programs in your community?
- Have you heard about the San Juan Hill neighborhood, where Lincoln Center is now? How has gentrification (residential and commercial community development) changed the cultural activity in your neighborhood? For better or worse?
- SoHarlem was started to develop a cultural industry workforce of skilled artisans in the fashion industry. Where are the creative incubator spaces in your community where people teach arts, crafts, technology for a new generation of creatives?
- When you think about the arts corridors in your neighborhood, where are the areas of opportunity for growth and expansion? What kinds of programs, or organizations are needed to support a thriving arts industry in this part of town?
- Janet’s dedication to building a space that serves the community through the arts is very special. Who are the people in your neighborhood who have invested in long-term arts development and are supporting community healing into the future?

**EP4: IN CONVERSATION - Journalist Lee A. Daniels with Senior Pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church, Rev. Michael A. Walrond**

We are honored to present this inspirational dialogue between journalist Lee A. Daniels and Rev. Michael A. Walrond Jr., Senior Pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church (FCBC). Listen to the powerful words of Pastor Mike, one of the most sought after teachers and preachers in the country who has grown his church’s congregation to a remarkable 11,000 members since joining FCBC in 2004, developing vital and innovative community programs dealing with mental health, policing, minimum wage, and food distribution.

“Harlem is more than a village. It is a transcendent idea,” says Harlem’s inspirational leader, Rev. Michael A. Walrond Jr., Senior Pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church. In a moving reflection on the state and future of Harlem, Rev. Michael A. Walrond Jr, Senior Pastor of First Corinthian Baptist Church, acknowledges the growth and “shininess” in his community, but stresses the importance of not overlooking those in the margins, the undercounted and unrecognized, the people he serves and ministers to everyday.

*Discussion Prompts:*

- What role does faith have in community healing? How do local faith leaders and institutions shape the spirit of community renewal and well-being in challenging times?
- Do you recall a time in your life when you have made a major change or move? Where did you get the courage to push through the challenge? What did you learn about yourself?
- How does the history of your community inspire you?
- As our communities venture to renew themselves, to transform, to grow - how are individuals and community organizations supporting “folks who are often overlooked”?
- What do you think about the idea of “normalizing trauma” and the need for African-American communities to prioritize mental health and wellness?
- How have gentrification and demographic shifts reshaped your community?
- Who are the uncelebrated people in your community who do a lot to support others in the community? What is their story? How might your community honor them for their healing presence and activities?

**EP3: IN CONVERSATION - Artist & Co-Founder of Blackberry Productions Stephanie Berry with President & CEO of the New York Urban League, Arva Rice**

Arva Rice, President and CEO of the New York Urban League, passionately reflects on the ongoing struggle for racial justice that has plagued Black and Brown communities through time. In this conversation with artist/educator Stephanie Berry, she reminds us that the tragic deaths of Medgar Evers, Rodney King, and George Floyd are catalysts for social change, inspiring the next generation of young people to carry the mantle and create hope and healing.

*Discussion Prompts:*

- What is a morning ritual or healing practice that you use to start your day with motivation and a sense of purpose?
- Are you familiar with the National Urban League in your community? If so, share what you know about the impact they have in your location. If not, go to [www.nul.org](http://www.nul.org) to learn more about the social mission of this national civil rights organization.
- The National Urban League is an example of how individuals in communities pool their resources together to address issues of social inequality as a collective effort.

What other groups in your community are actively working to uplift people in this way?

- How has the political and social climate of your community evolved? Have social issues been resolved and healed? Have certain issues persisted? What change have you witnessed in your lifetime?
- Do you believe in the collective power of people to face tragedy and hopelessness in uncertain times? Why or why not?
- Arva Rice quotes Coretta Scott King who said, “Freedom is won and lost in every generation.” Do you agree or disagree? What is the lesson in that wisdom for you and for younger generations?
- How are your local community organizations supporting youth in the post-pandemic healing work? How might you or others contribute to this work?
- Think about your personal audit as Dr. Rice suggested. Where are you connected to healing work in your individual life and in your community?

## **EP2: IN CONVERSATION - Host Rhina Valentin in conversation with visual artist Andrea Arroyo**

So happy to present our next healing dialogue, a truly charming conversation with renowned visual artist and longtime community collaborator, the wonderful Andrea Arroyo, conducted by our dynamic host and TV personality Rhina Valentin. This is a powerful conversation on the transformational power of art and its role as a force for hope, healing and change.

### *Discussion Questions:*

- What role do artists play in community healing?
- Andrea Arroyo coined the phrase “covidá”, a combination of covid and vida, meaning covid life? Drawing from your own experiences, and what you have witnessed in your community, how would you describe “covid life”?
- Despite the loss and sadness that characterizes “covid life”, how did you find space to “celebrate life” in the midst of so much trauma?
- Where are the community art projects happening in your local area? How can you participate and support this work of “collective grieving and processing”? What art projects would you like to see happen?
- What is your favorite piece of Andrea Arroyo’s artwork from the video?
- When you think about the global impact of the pandemic, what do you think we need to do as a global community to help communities renew themselves?

- Where do you find love and beauty in your community? In what spaces? With which people?
- What do you think about this quote by Andrea Arroyo? “Thinking about resilience...there is no time for us to be still. We move, we create, we live, we heal.”

### **EP1: IN CONVERSATION - Educator Deirdre Hollman with Senior Director of Education at the Apollo Theater Shirley Taylor**

Enjoy this animated conversation between two of Harlem’s remarkable and celebrated educators: Deirdre Hollman and Shirley Taylor, Senior Director of Education at the Apollo Theatre, as they share personal memories and history of their beloved Harlem and reflect on the key role arts and education plays in building community.

#### *Discussion Questions:*

- What is the role that museums and cultural institutions play in community healing and renewal?
- Shirley Taylor’s story of her “journey to the Apollo” reflects on the many ways that community culture and opportunities shape the trajectory of our lives. How did your community involvement as a young person impact your adult life and choices?
- Share an experience you have had with live theater or musical performance that lifted your spirits in the past two years.
- How is “the story of your community” being kept alive by people and places in your local area? Where are the community art spaces? Where are the historical memory sites? Who are the storytellers and legacy keepers in your community?
- When you look across the landscape of your community (buildings, streets, parks), where do you see the project to revitalize the infrastructure as well as the environment? How does capital investment in communities help shape the prospects for renewal in the post-pandemic era?
- Why are adult education programs important for creating a sense of belonging for community members?
- What kinds of community art projects would you like to see developed in your neighborhood?
- What do you appreciate about the cultural legacies living in your local community?

## PART 2: EXTENDED LEARNING ACTIVITIES

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### Healing Activity #1: **It Takes a Village - “Heroes of the Pandemic and Social Justice”**

In a crisis, communities come together to take care of their neighbors in need. The harlem is...healing digital storytelling project pays tribute to the activists, medical workers, chefs, artists, educators, crafts people, entrepreneurs, and families who made caring for their communities their priority during the COVID-19 pandemic. Read their tributes and find inspiration to look into your own neighborhood to support the healing efforts happening on a grassroots level.

### Healing Activity #2: **Honor the Healers in Your Community**

Create your own “Community Healing” project using social media tools like Instagram or TikTok to capture local stories of bravery. Take photos and post tributes to the ordinary people doing extraordinary things to keep their communities safe, joyful, and healthy during this global pandemic.

### Healing Activity #3: **The Healing Power of Poetry**

Poet and performer Daniel Carlton recites a poem called “Harlem Healing (Pandemic)” that bears witness to the devastating storm that is the coronavirus, and generates hope for the new day promised after the storm has passed. In the midst of it all, he honors the resilience of the Harlem community and its people. Listen to his recitation and read along on the link above. You too can use poetry to document your emotions related to these uncertain times, the challenges and the triumphs, the joy and the pain. Write a healing poem for your community!

### Healing Activity #4: **Healing the Wounds of Social Inequality**

The digital project *harlem is... Healing and Social Justice* celebrates Harlem residents who sustain the fight for social justice and racial equality in this community. Social activists and organizations like The Reverend Al Sharpton, We Act, and The Schomburg Center have been on the front lines of racial justice activism for decades in Harlem. Read about the social justice activists and artists in Harlem whose work is healing the community against the seemingly interminable adversaries of racism and poverty. Who are the social justice activists and artists in your community fighting for equality and opportunity for all? You can honor them with a digital campaign like *harlem is...Healing and Social Justice* and share their stories with the world.