

(What Makes You) Come Alive?

Notes on an Embodied Pedagogy

Max Barnewitz

Abstract

At the end of the Fall 2024 semester, I asked my class of freshmen honors students to answer in zine form “What Makes You Come Alive?” The question draws from philosopher Howard Thurman’s urgent message and Corita Kent’s vibrant call to action, “Come Alive” (1967). The fill-in-the-blank zine asks students to engage their inner Sendakian “wild things” and playfully answer to their deepest, wildest desires. The honors STEM majors were alarmed by the pathos of the task, but came away with shared empathy and increased connection with their peers. Zines have been a staple in my classrooms for their ability to engage embodied creativity and transform communities that honor diverse experiences. In my illustration courses, after a day each semester spent deconstructing AI generated images, we retreat to the library’s zine archive, pour over the fragile, hand-made works, and then sit and make our own zines, relishing the ragged edges and scratchy writing that could never be born of AI. As a trans arts scholar deeply invested in diversity and equity, my current scholarship is devoted to activating zines – in college level courses, youth summer camps, and circles of queer adult organizers – to help engage the classroom as an assemblage that resists fascist infrastructure, AI, and institutional censorship. This zine expands on four themes – fear, embodiment, play, and work – to harness the possibilities of zines in the classroom and build brave and embodied communities for shared empathy and powerful self-expression.

Acknowledgment

Special thanks to Juli Huddleston and Joshua Graham for their help with this zine.

References

- Kent, Corita and Jan Steward. *Learning by Heart: Teachings to Free the Creative Spirit*. New York: Allworth, 2008.
- Millman, Debbie. “Design Matters with Debbie Millman: Lynda Barry.” Produced by Design Matters Media. Design Matters with Debbie Millman. October 28, 2019. Podcast, MP3 File, 57:53, <https://open.spotify.com/episode/2n08DV08rIaD4VVaCV4rO7>
- Menon, Alok (@alokvmenon). Instagram post. July 9, 2025. <https://www.instagram.com/p/DL5rrrOOJVw/>
- Piepmeyer, Alison. “Why Zines Matter: Materiality and the Creation of Embodied Community.” *American Periodicals* 18, no. 2 (2008): 213–38.