

P  **V**

**Community
Engagement &
Education**

DISCUSSION GUIDE



North By Current

a film by Angelo Madsen Minax

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NORTH BY CURRENT

Filmmaker and artist Angelo Madsen Minax returns to his rural Michigan hometown after the death of his young niece. Decades of home movies and ethereal narration reflect on struggles with grief and addiction as Madsen examines family, faith, and transgender identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

2	Film Summary
3	Using this Guide
4	Key Participants
5	Key Issues
6	Before You Begin: Tips and Tools for Facilitators
9	Background Information
13	Sources
21	Resources
22	Discussion Guide Writer

This guide is an invitation to dialogue and requires preparation before you and your community dive in. This guide is designed for people who want to use *North By Current* to engage family friends, classmates, colleagues, and communities in honest, though challenging, conversations that will require all participants remain committed to being fully present. Conversations that center gender identity; feelings of belonging; addiction; abuse and safety; loss and grief can be difficult to begin and facilitate, but this guide is meant to support you in sustaining conversations in community. In contrast to initiatives that foster debates in which participants try to convince others that they are right, this document envisions conversations undertaken in a spirit of openness in which people listen actively and share different experiences and viewpoints with care and respect.

This discussion guide is meant to inspire people with varying degrees of knowledge, as well as dynamic and different experiences, in relation to these topics to enter the conversation, and stay present in the conversation, in order to impact change and awareness.

The discussion prompts are intentionally crafted to help a wide range of audiences think more deeply about the topics in the film. Rather than attempting to address them all, choose the questions that best meet your needs and interests. *And be sure to leave time to consider taking action.* Planning next steps can help people leave the room feeling energized and transformed, even in instances when conversations have been difficult and/or uncomfortable. Please also consider using the closing activity that gives participants an opportunity to collectively reflect before closing.

THE FILM: KEY PARTICIPANTS

- Angelo Madsen Minax, filmmaker and his family of origin
- Pam and Fred, mother and father of Angelo and Jesse
- Jesse, sister of Angelo, mother of Kalla, Levi, Joey, and Benny
- David, Jesse's husband, father of Levi, Joey, and Benny
- Levi and Joey, children of Jesse and David
- Voice of an unnamed child



THE FILM: KEY ISSUES



North by Current offers insight on a variety of themes individuals and families experience over the course of a lifetime. It will be particularly of interest to people who want to explore:

- Grief
- Coping
- Death of a child
- Motherhood
- Addiction
- Mental health
- The perspective of children
- Memory
- Adult sibling relationships
- Intimate partner violence
- Rural North America
- Class
- Whiteness
- Injustice in carceral systems
- Gender
- Gender roles and gendered expectations
- Patriarchy
- Religion
- Mormonism
- Transgender identities
- Storytelling
- Family archives
- Art making
- Transformation
- Subjectivity and perspective
- Home
- Being and becoming

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: TIPS AND TOOLS FOR FACILITATORS

The following are meant to support you as you prepare to facilitate a conversation that inspires curiosity, connection, critical questions, recognition of difference, power, and possibility for generating new ways of being in, and understanding, the world. Importantly you should prepare yourselves to engage in tensions that arise while also committing to refuse hate or violence in any form.

PREPARING TO FACILITATE

Participants in any conversation arrive with differing degrees of knowledge and lived experience with regards to the many topics *North By Current* invites you to explore, it is helpful to prepare yourself and ground yourself in both knowledge and intention ahead of facilitation. As a facilitator we urge you to take the necessary steps to ensure that you are prepared to guide a conversation that prioritizes the safety of those whose experiences and identities have been marginalized. This will allow you to set an intention (and sustain a generative dialogue) that maximizes care and critical curiosity, transformation, and connection.

The following are tools to support preparation and resources to use to invite your community into a shared space of dialogue after screening.

Helpful Concepts, Definition, and Language for Framing

Gender identity: Our deeply held, internal sense of self as masculine, feminine, a blend of both, neither, or something else. Identity also includes the name we use to convey our gender. Gender identity can correspond to, or differ from the sex we are assigned at birth. The language a person uses to communicate their gender identity can evolve and shift over time, especially as someone gains access to a broader gender vocabulary.

Gender role: The set of functions, activities, and behaviors commonly expected of boys/men and girls/women by society.

Sex: Used to label a person as “male” or “female” (some US states and other countries offer a third option) at birth, this term refers to a person’s external genitalia and internal reproductive organs. When a person is assigned a particular sex at birth, it is often mistakenly assumed that this will equate with their gender; it might, but it might not.

Transgender or simply **Trans:** Sometimes this term is used broadly as an umbrella term to describe anyone whose gender identity differs from their assigned sex. It can also be used more narrowly as a gender identity that reflects a binary gender identity that is “opposite” or “across from” the sex they were assigned at birth.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: TIPS AND TOOLS FOR FACILITATORS

Transition: “Transitioning” is a term commonly used to refer to the steps a transgender, Agender, or non-binary person takes in order to find congruence in their gender. But this term can be misleading as it implies that the person’s gender identity is changing and that there is a moment in time when this takes place. More typically, it is others’ understanding of the person’s gender that shifts. What people see as a “transition” is actually an alignment in one or more dimensions of the individual’s gender as they seek congruence across those dimensions. A transition is taking place, but it is often other people (parents and other family members, support professionals, employers, etc.) who are transitioning in how they see the individual’s gender, and not the person themselves. For the person, these changes are often less of a transition and more of an evolution. Instead of “transitioning,” a more apt phrase is “pursuing congruence measures.” A person can seek harmony in many ways:

- Social congruence measures: changes of social identifiers such as clothing, hairstyle, gender identity, name and/or pronouns;
- Hormonal congruence measures: the use of medical approaches such as hormone “blockers” or hormone therapy to promote physical, mental, and/or emotional alignment;
- Surgical congruence measures: the addition, removal, or modification of gender-related physical traits; and
- Legal congruence measures: changing identification documents such as one’s birth certificate, driver’s license, or passport.

Queer: A multi-faceted word that is used in different ways and means different things to different people. 1) Attraction to people of many genders. 2) Don’t conform to cultural norms around gender and/or sexuality. 3) A general term referring to all non-heterosexual people. Some within the community, however, may feel the word has been hatefully used against them for too long and are reluctant to embrace it.

This article from, “[Understanding Gender](#)” from Gender Spectrum is a helpful primer on gender identity and gender expression. The first five gender related definitions were taken from Gender Spectrum’s terminology page “[The Language of Gender](#)”, which can help those who are at the beginning of a learning process about transgender identities. The definition for queer was taken from [Vanderbilt University’s LBTQI Definitions](#).

Community Agreements: What are they? Why are they useful?

Community Agreements help provide a framework and parameters for engaging in dialogue that allows you to establish a shared sense of intention ahead of engaging in discussion. Community Agreements can be co-constructed and creating them can be used as an opening activity that your group collectively and collaboratively undertakes ahead of engaging in dialogue. [Here is a model](#) of Community Agreements you can review. As the facilitator, you can gauge how long your group should take to form these agreements or if participants would be amenable to pre-established community agreements.

BEFORE YOU BEGIN: TIPS AND TOOLS FOR FACILITATORS

Opening Activity (Optional): Establishing Community Agreements for Discussion

Whether you are a group of people coming together once for this screening and discussion, or a group that knows each other well, creating a set of community agreements helps foster clear discussion in a manner that draws in and respects all participants, especially when tackling intimate or complex conversations around identity. These steps will help provide guidelines for the process:

- Pass around sample community agreements and take time to read aloud as a group to make sure all participants can both hear and read the text.
- Allow time for clarifying questions; make sure all understand the purpose of making a set of agreements and allow time to make sure everyone understands the agreements themselves.
- Go around in a circle and have every participant name an agreement they would like to include. Chart this in front of the room where all can see.
- Go around 2-3 times to give participants multiple chances to contribute and to also give a conclusive end to the process.
- Read the list aloud.
- Invite questions or revisions.
- Ask if all are satisfied with the list.
- Ask all participants to sign the list of agreements. Leave it where all can see. As the facilitator, be mindful of the agreements throughout your session, noting if someone speaks or acts in a way that runs counter to them.



BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Two or three things I know for sure and, one of them is that change when it comes cracks everything open.”

*-Dorothy Allison, **Two or Three Things I Know for Sure**, pg 48*

North by Current weaves documentary storytelling, poetry, family mythology, and the liminality of memory to explore four years in the filmmakers’ family of origin, after the tragic death of his sister’s first child. The discussion guide will similarly weave poetry as a tool to reflect on the topics presented in the film. *North by Current* examines the universality of both spoken and unspoken themes.

“Every writing course I ever heard of said the same thing. Take one story, follow it through, beginning, middle, end. I don’t do that. I never do. Behind the story I tell is the one I don’t. Behind the story you hear is the one I wish I could make you hear.”

*--Dorothy Allison, **Two or Three Things I Know for Sure**, p. 39*

The spoken themes of grief, loss and coping, addiction, mental health, intimate partner violence, the criminal legal system, transgender identity, the influence of religion, patriarchy and gender roles, family dynamics and history, and the perspective of children in **North By Current** give insight into one family’s experience. The backdrop of rural, poor, white America, provides a backdrop for unspoken themes, and provides the context in which this experience exists. According to the [Institute for Research on Poverty](#), “[N]ationally, about one in five children live in a family with an income below the poverty threshold; more than one in four rural children lives in poverty, with even higher rates for rural children of color.” Grayling, Michigan, the filmmaker’s hometown, has a population of roughly 5,600, 98.2% of whom are white, and 13.3% of the town’s population living in poverty.

Initially, filmmaker, Angelo Madsen Minax, disclosed that he intended to examine injustices within the criminal legal and carceral systems through the lens of class, location, race, and gender. While these themes are present throughout the film, they surface in snippets of his family members’ memories and recollections of their lived experiences.

“Memory is a choice. You said that once, with your back to me, the way a god would say it.”

*-Ocean Vuong, **On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous**, p. 75*

North by Current invites the viewer to piece together their understanding of the non-linear, and as Minax’s mother states, “circular grieving process” of coping with the loss of his 19 month old niece, Kalla. The film does so without taking on a singular perspective. Instead, each family member: grandparents, siblings, spouses, and children offer elements of their experience from their particular point of view.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

“Two or three things I know for sure and one of them is that telling the story all the way through is an act of love.”

*-Dorothy Allison, **Two or Three Things I Know for Sure**, p. 90*

The film gently illuminates the tension many transgender and queer people who opt to migrate to urban places, experience when faced with returning home to rural places. Viewers bear witness to this negotiation as we watch Minax coming and going between his historic hometown and his current city life.

“This particular relation between the queer/trans body and the city is strangely resonant... We the emotionally starved; we, who have been thrown from the void, who have turned to the city when there was nowhere else. Well, maybe not all of us, but I know I have so many times felt the city itself was my mother, and I her asphalt nursling.”

*-Jordy Rosenberg, **Confessions of the Fox**, p. 69*

Minax’s transgender identity, while not the focus in an educative sense, provides the undercurrent to story. He learns that his parents equated their grieving process related to his transition to their grieving process of their granddaughter’s actual death. Over the course of the four years of filming, the audience gets to witness transformation, shift in perspective, and ultimately growth and repair between Minax and his parents.

“You’re a mother, Ma. You’re also a monster. But so am I--which is why I can’t turn away from you.”

*-Ocean Vuong, **On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous**, p. 14*

Themes of motherhood, the Mormon belief in the supreme responsibility of reproduction to create earthly homes for spirits awaiting bodies,¹ and the role patriarchy and masculinity play in these belief systems, also highlight the important ways that queerness fundamentally challenges these rigidly structured sets of ideas.

“I had thought sex was to breach new ground, despite terror, that as long as the world did not see us, its rules did not apply. But I was wrong. The rules, they were already inside us.”

*-Ocean Vuong, **On Earth We Are Briefly Gorgeous**, p. 120*

1 Conley LJ. Childbearing and childrearing practices in Mormonism. Neonatal Netw. 1990 Oct;9(3):41-8. PMID: 2215445. Retrieved from: <https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/2215445/>

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The use of narration and poetic reflection by Minax, as well as an omniscient child voice - and eventually dialogue between the two - provide insight into Minax's subjective experience. This artfully allows the viewer to delve into themes present in his mind as he cycles through his own grief around the loss of his niece and his family's response to his gender identity. This is in contrast to the silence from his sister about the experience of losing a child. Alongside one another, these personal responses provide another window into the complexity of grief and the ways people within a family system cope with loss. Instead of hearing her express her reflections, we see bits and pieces of Jesse's subsequent three pregnancies and the reality of raising children within the context of an abusive relationship, rippled with substance use, and the unspoken presence of her lost child.

"3.

*The technology of silence
The ritual, etiquette*

*the blurring of terms
silence not absence*

*of words or music or even
raw sounds*

*Silence can be a plan
rigorously executed*

the blueprint to a life

*It is a presence
it has a history a form*

*Do not confuse it
with any kind of absence"*

*-Adrienne Rich, excerpt from "Cartographies of Silence"
The Dream of a Common Language, pg. 17*

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

As time unfolds, we see three children grow from infants to toddlers to young children. Through their eyes and words, the audience has a window into their understanding of their father's incarceration and eventual release; their mother's struggles with grief, addiction, and mental health; and their parent's relationship, which includes physical abuse.

"Be a child again. Teach me poetry. Teach me the rhythm of the sea. Return to words their original innocence. Give birth to me from a grain of wheat, not from a wound. Give birth to me and take me back to a world before meaning, so I can embrace you on the grass. Do you hear me? A world before meaning. The tall trees walked with us as trees, not as meaning. The naked moon crawled with us. A moon, not a silver platter, for meaning. Be a child again. Teach me poetry. Teach me the rhythm of the sea. Take my hand, so we can cross this threshold between night and day together. Together we will learn the first words, and will build a secret nest of the sparrow, our third sibling. Be a child again, so I can see my face in your mirror. Are you I? Am I you? Teach me poetry, so I can elegize you now, now, now. Just as you elegize me!"

*-Mahmoud Darwish, excerpt of "III"
In the Presence of Absence, p. 32*

Throughout the film, the audience is able to see the family over time. There are opportunities to circle back to bits of the story left out in previous tellings. There are chances to understand that the telling doesn't all happen at once. We learn that questions can provoke new information, that silence can tell its own story, that different perspectives and recollections don't have to be in competition with one another, and that the story won't end when the camera stops rolling.

i am not done yet

*"as possible as yeast
as imminent as bread
a collection of safe habits
a collection of cares
less certain that i seem
more certain than i was
a changed changer
i continue to continue
where i have been
most of my lives is
where i'm going"*

*-Lucille Clifton, "i am not done yet"
good woman: poems and a memoir 1969-1980, pg. 141*

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D. W. Rothwell and B. C. Thiede, "Child Poverty in Rural America," *Focus* 34(3), available at <https://www.irp.wisc.edu/wp/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/Focus-34-3d.pdf>.

United States Census Bureau. Grayling charter township, Crawford County, Michigan. US Department of Commerce. available at <https://www.census.gov/quickfacts/fact/table/graylingchartertowntshipcrawfordcountymichigan/BZA115219>

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

**STARTING THE CONVERSATION**

Immediately after the film, you may want to give people a few quiet moments to reflect on what they have seen. You could pose a general question (examples below) and give people some time to themselves to jot down or think about their answers before opening the discussion:

- What are the initial themes that rise to the surface for you after seeing *North by Current*?
- Was there a scene or a moment in the film that you found particularly moving or uncomfortable? What was it about that scene that moved you?
- Did you find any common ground between the people in your family and the people in the film? What was similar to or different from your own experience?
- If you were going to describe the film to someone, what might you say?
- If you could ask anyone in the film a single question, whom would you ask and what would you want to know?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Alternatively, you could ask participants to engage in the following activity: Close your eyes. *Inhale* for a count of five. *Hold* for a count of seven. *Exhale* for a count of nine. Repeat three times.

After a few quiet moments, ask participants to reflect - with their eyes closed - on one image that comes to mind from the film. Ask them to consider what feelings this image evokes in their bodies. Offer them an opportunity to share with the person beside them or to share as a group.

Close this activity by inviting participants to read a selection of poems or quotes provided in the background information and reflect on how these selections connect to the film and their experiences of screening the film.

MEMORY, STORYTELLING & HOME

The child voice states, “Memory must be created against an abundance of information. But also against an absence, it has to be constructed. You assemble the fractures. Arrange the incidences to build a story.”

Throughout the film, we see archival family home videos across generations. The film includes current footage Minax is documenting. What role do you think documentation plays in the creation of memory, family lore, and storytelling?

After sharing the footage of his baptism into the Mormon faith and the revelation he experienced, Angelo states, “You start assessing the border between belief and truth. What you know and what you trust.” Later in the film the child voice states, “Humans create stories to explain things. To understand the world they occupy. You already know that. But when you lie to yourself long enough, you begin to believe a particular version of a story.”

Was there a point of view presented in the film that resonated most for you? Which one? Describe your impression of that point of view.

Throughout the film there is a tension between Angelo’s coming and going between his historic, rural hometown and his current city life. The child voice states, “When you leave a place the place goes on living without you. This is painfully obvious, yet humans manage to forget it over and over.” Later, Angelo recalls, “I am trying to remember why exactly I drug us through this.” The child voice responds, “Because you believed that the choices you’ve made render you unlovable. That the distance you enforced, would protect you from suffering.”

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What role do you think distance plays in this film’s narrative structure? Consider both the time passed between Kalla’s death in 2013, and the film taking place between 2016-2020. Consider, also, the physical distance between Angelo and his family of origin.

Near the end of the film, Angelo shares another revelation, “I learned a secret. When you speak the pain’s name, it dissipates. When the pain’s great, you have to speak it over and over and over again. I want to go back in time and tell this secret to all our former selves.” The child narrator responds, “Tell it to all your future selves instead.”

In what ways do you agree or disagree that talking about, and telling the story of difficult histories, memories, and experiences is a path to transforming them? In your experience, what factors make speaking pain’s name so difficult?

RACE, CLASS & RURAL CARCERAL SYSTEMS

Grayling is the filmmaker’s home town, which provides the backdrop of a predominantly white, rural, working-class small town in northern Michigan. The audience learns Angelo’s brother-in-law, David was accused of murdering his niece, with his sister implicated for child abuse and neglect. We see snippets of the family’s perspective on the criminal legal system’s incompetence and corruption. The case against David was ultimately dismissed and settled.

In what ways do you imagine the ripple effects of a multi-year legal battle, and David’s incarceration during the investigation, impacted the family as they navigated small town life while grieving the loss of Kalla?

Imagine if this same scenario had occurred with a trusted lawyer in the community being accused of the death of his girlfriend’s toddler. Do you think it would have played out in a similar way? What if a Black man was accused for the death of his girlfriend’s toddler? Do you think there would have been a similar outcome to David’s? Why or why not? What factors do you think insulated and protected Minax’s family? What factors do you think contributed to the criminal investigation after the hospital’s initial assessment was that Kalla’s death was a tragic accident?

How do you understand class and race as factors shaping Jesse and David’s experience with the criminal legal system?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

GENDER & TRANSGENDER IDENTITIES

Both ideas around, and experiences of, gender, gender roles, gendered expectations, and heterosexuality are present throughout the film. This is highlighted through beliefs passed down through the Mormon faith, familial structures of Christian patriarchy, and socialization. Namely, the belief that it is the ultimate duty of all humans' to have children in order to provide bodies for awaiting souls is highlighted. The audience witnesses Jesse's series of three pregnancies after Kalla's death and Angelo's self-reflection about his own value as a childless adult through this belief system.

In what ways do your own beliefs about reproduction, bodily autonomy, and gender overlap or diverge from those presented in the film?

Did this film allow you to critically reflect on personal belief systems and the impacts they may have on people you love?

While Jesse may conform to some notions of stereotypical gender roles, she stands in stark contrast to others. Angelo presents his sister Jesse as “the most impenetrable person I know,” and later wonders, “is stoicism only for men?”

What other ways do you see stereotypical gender roles confronted and challenged in the film? What about ways that you see traditional gender roles reinforced?

In his reflections on his interviews with David, Angelo notes, “In your world there is a tension between what it means to be a good man and what it means to be a real man.” And later, “I feel a deep sense of sorrow for this man. For the things that have happened. But also because he was never told that being a good man is the same thing as being a good person.”

Why do you think notions of being a good person are tied to how “well” a person conforms to stereotypical notions of masculinity or femininity? In what ways did this film help you challenge your own conceptions of masculinity and ‘goodness?’

In *North by Current*, the audience has the opportunity to enter the film exactly where Angelo's family is in the process of understanding his transgender identity. It is not intended to generally educate the audience about transgender identities, but instead an opportunity to witness the way one family's dynamics shift, change, and remain the same over time.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

His gender is central to his identity and fosters an imagined dialogue with his dead niece about loss and grief. Early on in the film, this conversation happens between Angelo and his parents:

“Do you want to hear about our other kid we lost?”

“We’ve lost two. A grandchild and a daughter.”

“We had a little girl named Angela. She was quite the character. And, uh, we never talked about it before but...she was quite the little sweetheart.”

“So, you would equate my transition with Kalla’s death?”

“Well, we’ve got memories of a little girl growing up.”

“I think it would be the same thing if you had a child and something happened to that child and they no longer were the same person. You would grieve, you know, who they were for the years that they were someone different. And once I realized I had to grieve that as a loss, then it helped with my acceptance a lot better..”

How do you think the generational divide between Angelo and his parents influenced this conversation? How do you imagine this conversation might sound with parents who are Angelo’s age (roughly late 30’s) having a similar conversation with their child today?

Throughout the film, Minax alludes to a question that’s been haunting him for years, but that he hasn’t been able to find the words to speak. Eventually, in 2020 he interviews his mother, asking her about an initial response she had to him beginning to take hormones. He recalls she was questioning if, “...me being trans was God punishing you for having had me.” He follows up with, “and I just want to ask you if you still feel that way?” After asking the question that has been replaying in his brain for years, he learns his mother doesn’t remember the exchange, but she is able to explain how her perspective has shifted, apologize, and ask for forgiveness.

Do you have instances with a formative memory between you and another person that has significantly shaped your life, but the other person does not recall? How have you bridged the gap between the two radically different recollections?

Near the end of the film, Fred tells the story of Pam speaking during a Mormon church service, talking about Jesse and Angelo, and shares that she said, “We all have things we have to adapt to.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

And the crux of her talk was, you have to love ‘em the way they are now. That’s the way it is. And if somebody doesn’t like it that my daughter is transgender or if the church doesn’t agree with it, I’ve got a big problem with that.

What do you think contributed to Pam’s ability to speak out in support of her transgender child in her religious community? What do you think inhibited Pam from speaking directly to her child with the same commitment and support before he asked?

THE PERSPECTIVE OF CHILDREN

A powerful throughline of the film is the perspective of Jesse and David’s children Levi and Joey. The audience has the privilege of hearing how Levi and Joey are making sense of their world around them. Their play, commentary, and insights cut to the core of many of the themes presented in the film. We see Levi playing “jail” while his father is incarcerated. We hear a child witness their unconscious mother asking, “Is mommy dead?” We learn the way Levi’s grandmother Pam explains, in matter of fact terms, the death of the sister he never met. We absorb that Levi witnessed his father kick in his mother’s teeth. We experience Joey explaining the relationship between her parents and that “Daddy and mommy don’t really like each other.” And that daddy only likes mommy “when she has lipstick on.” All of these shine a light on the acute awareness children have of their environments.

Were you surprised by the children’s ability to synthesize what they have observed? Why or why not?

The children are not sheltered from the realities of poverty, addiction, violence, and death. But there are protective factors in their lives, including loving care and the undeniable resilience within their family of origin.

Do you believe it is possible for moments of genuine connection, love, and care to permeate as much as the moments of suffering? In what ways can we foster connections strong enough to weather pain that is associated with being alive and being human?

What role do you imagine the creation of this film played in supporting the family’s connections to one another? How can art making contribute to the processing and integration of trauma into a familial story?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

CLOSING QUESTIONS

At the end of your discussion, to help people synthesize what they've experienced and move the focus from dialogue to action steps, you may want to choose one of these questions:

- What did you learn from this film that you wish everyone knew? What would change if everyone knew it?
- If you could require one person (or one group) to view this film, who would it be? What would you hope their main takeaway would be?
- Complete this sentence: I am inspired by this film (or discussion) to _____.

Closing Poem (To be read aloud as a group):***What I Didn't Know Before***

was how horses simply give birth to other horses. Not a baby by any means, not a creature of liminal spaces, but a four-legged beast hellbent on walking, scrambling after the mother. A horse gives way to another horse and then suddenly there are two horses, just like that. That's how I loved you. You, off the long train from Red Bank carrying a coffee as big as your arm, a bag with two computers swinging in it unwieldily at your side. I remember we broke into laughter when we saw each other. What was between us wasn't a fragile thing to be coddled, cooed over. It came out fully formed, ready to run.

-Ada Limon, "What I didn't Know Before"
The Carrying: Poems, p. 71

Here are some resources and organizations you can explore and share with your community for continued learning, growth, and connection:

Resources for queer and trans people:

- List of National Queer Resources:
<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/resources/national-resources>
- MAP (Movement Advancement Project) Rural LGBTQ+ Resources:
<https://www.lgbtmap.org/rural-lgbt-resources>

Resources for parents raising a gender expansive child:

- Family Acceptance Project:
<https://familyproject.sfsu.edu/publications>
- Raising Your Gender Expansive Child:
<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/supportive-parenting>
- Healthy Parenting Tips Around Gender:
<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/healthy-parenting-tips>

Definitions and building your understanding of gender, transgender identities, and queer identities:

- LGBTQ+ Terminology:
<https://www.vanderbilt.edu/lgbtqi/resources/how-to-ask-about-sexuality-gender>
- The Language of Gender:
<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/language-of-gender>
- A Guide to Gender Identity Terms:
<https://www.npr.org/2021/06/02/996319297/gender-identity-pronouns-expression-guide-lgbtq>
- Understanding Gender:
<https://genderspectrum.org/articles/understanding-gender>

Addiction and Substance Use:

- Overdose Prevention:
<https://harmreduction.org/our-work/overdose-prevention/>
- Harm Reduction Resources:
<https://harmreduction.org/all-resources/>

Mental Health Resources:

- NAMI (National Alliance on Mental Illness) Resources:
<https://www.nami.org/Support-Education/NAMI-HelpLine/Top-HelpLine-Resources>
- NACG (National Alliance for Children's Grief):
<https://childrengrieve.org>

AJ JENNINGS

AJ Jennings (they/them) is an early childhood educator in Chicago, IL. They are committed to listening closely to children and fostering a classroom environment that supports positive identity development. They have served as the Curriculum and Professional Development Director at the Illinois Safe Schools Alliance, an organization that advocates for schools to create affirming learning environments for LGBTQ+ students in Illinois.

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