



How Do We Define Success? Free Street Program’s Popular Defamation Project Chicago, IL - 2005 - 2006

Introduction

Free Street is a place where inner city, at-risk Chicago youth have been collaborating with emerging artists and professional artists since 1969. The “Popular Defamation” project examined the rise of popular poetry in urban America in the 19th century and the rise of rap music in the 20th century. The goal of the civic reflection portion of the project was to deepen our understanding of how popular images of superiority and excess operate on our ideas of identity and success.

Participants

Twenty youth (aged 13-21) and four adult artists.

Guiding Questions and Readings

- How do you find similarities and differences in things?
- What does it mean to be superior?
- What are the dangers of unequal relations between people?
- When do we become leaders?
- What is authentic action?
- How do we define success?

Sessions	Readings	Guiding Questions
Session 1: Facilitated by Bryn Magnus and Ron Bieganski	<i>Never Let Me Go</i> , Kazuo Ishiguro (novel)	How can we measure our gift’s worth? Whom should I serve and why?
Session 2: Facilitated by playwright Shawn Reddy	<i>A Season in Hell (Second Delirium: The Alchemy of the Word)</i> , Arthur Rimbaud (poem)	What does it mean to be superior? How do you find similarities and differences in things?
Session 3	<i>Dream Within a Dream</i> , Edgar Allan Poe (poem)	What limits our responsibility to others? What justifies or explains relations of power?
Session 4	<i>The Emperor’s Bird’s-Nest</i> , Henry Wadsworth Longfellow (poem)	What is authentic action? When do we become leaders?
Session 5	<i>Respect</i> , Notorious B.I.G. (song)	How do we define success? When do we become leaders?
Session 6	<i>Hit ‘Em Up</i> , Tupac Shakur (song)	What are the dangers of unequal relations between people? What limits our responsibility to others?

Special Feature of this Conversation

This group provided variety – variety in facilitators, media, and subject matter. While this can be important for a range of audiences, given the age of most of the participants, this variety was likely a key to its success.

Facilitator(s)

Bryn Magnus

Ron Bieganski

Shawn Reddy (playwright)