

**My Body, A Bridge:
a somatic abolitionist writer's workshop**

*“Caring for myself is not self-indulgence, it is self-preservation,
and that is an act of political warfare.” - Audre Lorde*

Themes: poetry, embodiment, healing justice, somatic abolition, meditation, mindfulness, experimental writing, and somatic writing

Unit Titles

Cycle 1 - Reintroducing Ourselves to Ourselves

Cycle 2 - Pain & Grief

Cycle 3 - Joy & Love

Cycle 4 - Movement & Action

What is a “somatic abolitionist writers workshop?”

Somatic abolitionism is defined by Resmaa Menakem (MSW, LICSW, SEP) as a, “living, embodied anti-racist practice and cultural building—a way of being in the world. It is a return to the age-old wisdom of human bodies respecting, honoring, and resonating with other human bodies... Somatic Abolitionism is not a human invention. It is the resourcing of energies that are always present in your body, in the collective body, and in the world... Somatic Abolitionism is an emergent form of growing up and growing into a more fuller energetic human experience.” A somatic abolitionist writers workshop uses this embodied practice, a culturally responsive and socially critical form of meditation and mindfulness, as a path of entry to a writing practice. Both writing and meditation call for the cultivation of a deep and ongoing relationship with one’s inner life in order to navigate and affect the outer world we live in. This workshop will pair mindfulness exercises with writing activities to unite body, mind and voice and support its participants in building “right relationship,” or the idea of an inherent interconnectedness of all beings and the earth, a core tenant in spiritual, wisdom & liberation traditions across the world.

What need is being met?

It is no secret that the past few years have brought a new depth of cultural trauma to the lives of people across the globe. It’s also no secret that young people across Chicago, especially Black and brown youth, have carried the brunt of that trauma at the intersection of racist national, state and city policies, policing, and inadequate responses to the ongoing COVID pandemic. There is a deep need for safe and structured spaces for the youth of Chicago to commune and reflect on the realities of their lived experiences and develop new and creative tools to support resilience and resistance in the face of ongoing injustice. This program will meet this need by holding regular workshops where young people can move at their own pace in building right relationship in their emotional lives, continue a healing journey themselves and create opportunities for healing in their communities through their writing.

Why is YCA equipped to meet it?

The core tenet of all YCA programs is that they are designed to enable young people to examine the life they know and share their stories so that others may learn from them. This workshop series builds upon this tenet by asking young people to engage in contemplative practices that examine the internal and external lives they both know and are still coming to know. It comes in the wake of YCA's call to examine its life as an organization and engage in healing and transformative processes with its staff, students, and community members. This new program is a natural outgrowth of this process and a desire to build more space for young people to hold honest conversations with themselves and each other about what it means to heal, to transform, and to grow closer to liberation from the inside out.

What will participants experience?

Participants will be welcomed to a weekly space where they can trust facilitators to guide them through mindful and critical reflective exercises through meditation and writing. The workshop will be held hybridly, in person and virtually so that participants can access the space however they need. Each session participants will greet each other, be introduced to the week's theme, then engage in a short meditation before spending time together writing and sharing work they feel resonates with the space. The workshop will be held across 12 weeks and composed of 4 units or cycles of 3 workshops centered around a common theme. At the end of the 12-week workshop series, participants will be supported by YCA in a celebration of their contemplation and writing with a publication or reading event.

Who are the facilitators?

Robin Reid Drake (she/they) is a Chicago (Kiiikaapoi, Peoria, Kaskaskia, Bodéwadmiakiwen & Myaamia lands) based writer, artist and educator originally from Greensboro, North Carolina (Eno, Sappony & Shakori lands). White, trans & queer, Drake is passionate about combining abolitionist somatics, creative practice and popular education to heal lines of violence in herself and her communities. She holds an MFA in writing from the School of the Art Institute of Chicago, a BA in writing from the University of North Carolina at Asheville and certification in meditation & mindfulness instruction from MNDFL Studio in New York City. Drake's written work can be found in DREGINALD, Palimpsest, WUSSY, Understory Quarterly, and Foglifter Press' Home Is Where You Queer the Heart, among others.

Chima "Naira" Ikoro (she/they) is an interdisciplinary writer, a student of the Young Chicago Authors' space since 2014, and a Louder Than A Bomb alum. With poetry as her first language, she took fifth place at the Women of The World Poetry slam in 2020. Currently, she is the Community Organizing section editor at South Side Weekly, and the co-founder of a mutual aid organization, Blck Rising.