

BRIDGE and Mass MoCA present

Octavia Butler's Parable of the Sower Book Club for Cauleen Smith Exhibit

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Facilitated By Gwendolyn VanSant



***“Kindness eases Change.***

***Love quiets fear.***

***And a sweet and powerful Positive obsession Blunts pain,***

***Diverts rage,***

***And engages each of us***

***In the greatest, The most intense Of our chosen struggles”***

Add Headings (Format > Paragraph styles) and they will appear in your table of contents.

### Opening- IceBreaker

- Name, Residence
- Welcome
- Why did you read this book?
- Why did you join this discussion?
- A scene, character or quote that remains with you

## Octavia Butler

- Black Feminist Writer
- Black Woman Science Fiction Writer
- MacArthur Fellow - “genius award”

Referenced by Artist: Cauleen Smith

Referenced by Writer/Activist: Adrienne maree Brown

(From Gazette) In her essay “*Positive Obsession*,” science fiction author Octavia Butler, referenced in Smith’s catalog of books for “deep and active study,” asks

**“*What good is science fiction’s thinking about the present, the future, the past? What good is its tendency to warn or to consider alternative ways of thinking and doing?*”**

## Prescience on Social Issues:

- Butler called the *Earthseed* series a warning, not a premonition. What parallels can be drawn between this world and ours, 30 years after publication?
- What does this novel have to say about *poverty? Slavery? Race?*
- What does the novel have to say about institutions (particularly the police, corporations, big pharma, or the government)? The wall? Climate change?

According to Bankole, many of them did die, but some survived as the climate changed, warmed. Old-timers among our neighbors complain about the loss of their fog, rain, and cool temperatures. We don’t mind, those of us from southern California. To us it’s as though we’ve come to a somewhat gentler version of the homes we were forced to leave. Here, there is still water, space, not too much debilitating heat, and some peace. Here, one can still have orchards and groves. Here, life can still come from death.

*Parable of the Sower*  
by Octavia E. Butler

#kindlequotes

## Earthseed - a Religion or a song

*the compass spins around  
north becomes south,  
becomes simply the horizon  
the direction that matters is forward  
we conjure from the darkness  
a future orientation of the people*

*moving like firstlight, touching everyone  
moving like water  
weeping and crashing through mountains  
nothing is permanent  
    “to shape god  
shape self”  
our destiny is to “take root amongst the stars”.  
where do you think earth is?  
root.*

### **#earthseed #octaviabutler (Adrienne maree brown)**

- What do you make of the central tenets of Lauren’s religion/philosophy, Earthseed: “*All that you touch you change, all that you change changes you*”?
- What are the tools at Lauren’s disposal in spreading her message? Which are more or less effective and why?

### **Emergent Thinking- Adrienne maree brown**

*what Octavia gives us. “the visionary of stones reminds us that being grounded need not mean being boring. a dazzling diva whose glamor is drawn from the natural world, the visionary represents the pinnacle of intuitive connection to the earth element. when the visionary appears in your reading, recognize that you have the power to reshape your world.”*

(Blog Regarding opera version in a Black theatre by Adrienne maree brown) ...

*and emergent strategy was so apparent. the verses Toshi (Reagan) selected – “**belief initiates action or it does nothing**”, “**embrace diversity**” – are those that most read as instructions for how to survive the impossible.*

- Are there suggestions offered to improve our institutions (systems of oppressions) in Butler’s book? If so, what are they?
- What role does community building play for Lauren? What is the message here in the following quote: *Civilization is to groups what intelligence is to individuals. It is a means of combining the intelligence of many to achieve ongoing group adaptation.* (Lauren)

### **Hyperempathy:**

- Why did Butler choose a hyperempath as the protagonist in the story that takes place in 2024?

- Reflect on times we experienced the hyperempathy of Lauren in this book: pain, grief, loss.
- What statement could the author have been making in creating the pyros?

### AfroFuturist

Afrofuturism combines science fiction and fantasy with African mythologies. ... The art that comes out of this genre not only conceptualizes the world through fiction and fantasy but challenges the world as it exists now. (One.net)

*She died at the tragically early age of 58, but we are lucky to have this novel and its sequel, Parable of the Talents. Its title refers to the Biblical verse that describes not the seed, but the differing grounds it falls on; a challenge to readers who will be the ground for seeds of warning.*  
~ Gloria Steinem

- How has Octavia Butler challenged us in *The Parable of the Sower*?
- What are your final thoughts about destiny inspired by Butler’s character, our protagonist, Lauren?

### Closing Evaluation

Now seen as a forecasting of our future —30 years early—How is this book (and its sequel) showing empathy as a vital tool for navigating and improving today’s world, or ultimately is it a liability?

In true activism spirit, what does this inspire you to do next?

Share one word, sentiment or feeling of this Black Feminist Book Club Experience for the Cauleen Smith exhibit.

