The Art of Being a Black Man

EXPERIENTIAL CURRICULUM FOR HIGH SCHOOL AGED PARTICIPANTS

The Art of Being a Black Man

About Brotherhood of Elders

MAKING A DIFFERENCE FOR AFRICAN-AMERICAN MEN AND BOYS

The Brotherhood of Elders' origins can be traced to a simple, straightforward question asked of a small group of African-American men in 2010. The question was asked by Arnold Perkins, the former Director of Public Health for Alameda County and a longtime human rights champion and activist in the Bay Area. The question was simply: "Would you be interested in helping young black boys?" The responses, the interest and the subsequent actions were all extremely positive. And...as it is often said with social movements, the rest is history.

In 2011, the Brotherhood of Elders began meeting and shaping its direction. While exploring and entertaining a variety of thoughts regarding the organization's goals and direction, the Elders were steadfast in their commitment to shaping programs and interventions that would positively impact the lives of African-American men and boys.

In order to make their interventions as effective as possible, the Elders adopted an intergenerational approach by creating the Brotherhood of Elders Network- an intergenerational community of influential African American men who influence civic institutions to better meet the needs of African American young people. The network is comprised of three distinct groups. First, are the Elders for men 55 years of age and older; second is the Brothermanhood Group which focuses on men 35 to 55; and third are the Warriors group comprised of young men from 20 to 35 years of age. While the Elders establish the strategic direction of the organization, the Brothermanhood and Warriors groups provide tactical support and youth-centered advice and direction. Each group is intentionally organized to execute specific tasks of an overall strategy to improve the outcomes for African American young people in Oakland, California.

The Elders have established a partnership with The California Endowment which provided financial support to create this Manhood Development Curriculum. The Elders' goal is to train a cadre of Bay Area residents who will use the curriculum in schools, at churches, at youth and community centers as well as other places where the lives of African-American young men and boys can be touched.

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Introduction

There is a powerful word among the Zulu in South Africa called ***ubuntu***. The word means that our humanity is found and nurtured in our extraordinary ability to love, connect, and prepare the next generation to create a world that is better than the one we found. In the spirit of *ubuntu*, we offer this tool kit to prepare African-American boys and young men to flex their collective might, in order to change our world. It is not an easy task to make a boy become a man. In fact, it is an impossible task. What is possible, however, is to open the pathways to manhood, nudging, pushing, and encouraging each young man to take their courageous first step on their journey. When all is done, we realize that becoming a man is not a recipe, or a seven-step process. But rather it is an art wherein young men make a choice to love, connect, and create a better world together.

The Art of Being a Black Man is a tool kit that offers one such pathway for African-American boys and young men. This tool kit was compiled by the best and the brightest minds America has to offer on the topic. These minds included professors, classroom teachers, researchers, evaluators, curriculum experts, and "brothas who just give a damn." All poured their energy and souls into each word, hoping that one of the experiences found in the tool kit would leave an indelible imprint on the hearts and minds of our young men.

This tool kit offers structured activities designed to influence how young men think, act, and feel in preparation for their journey to manhood. The discussions and activities are meant to challenge and engage young men in dialogue, strengthen critical thinking, and build their emotional intelligence. This tool kit includes 70 games, activities and state-of-the-art strategies to support African-American young men and boys. Each activity provides detailed instructions and explanations for facilitating discussion and building community.
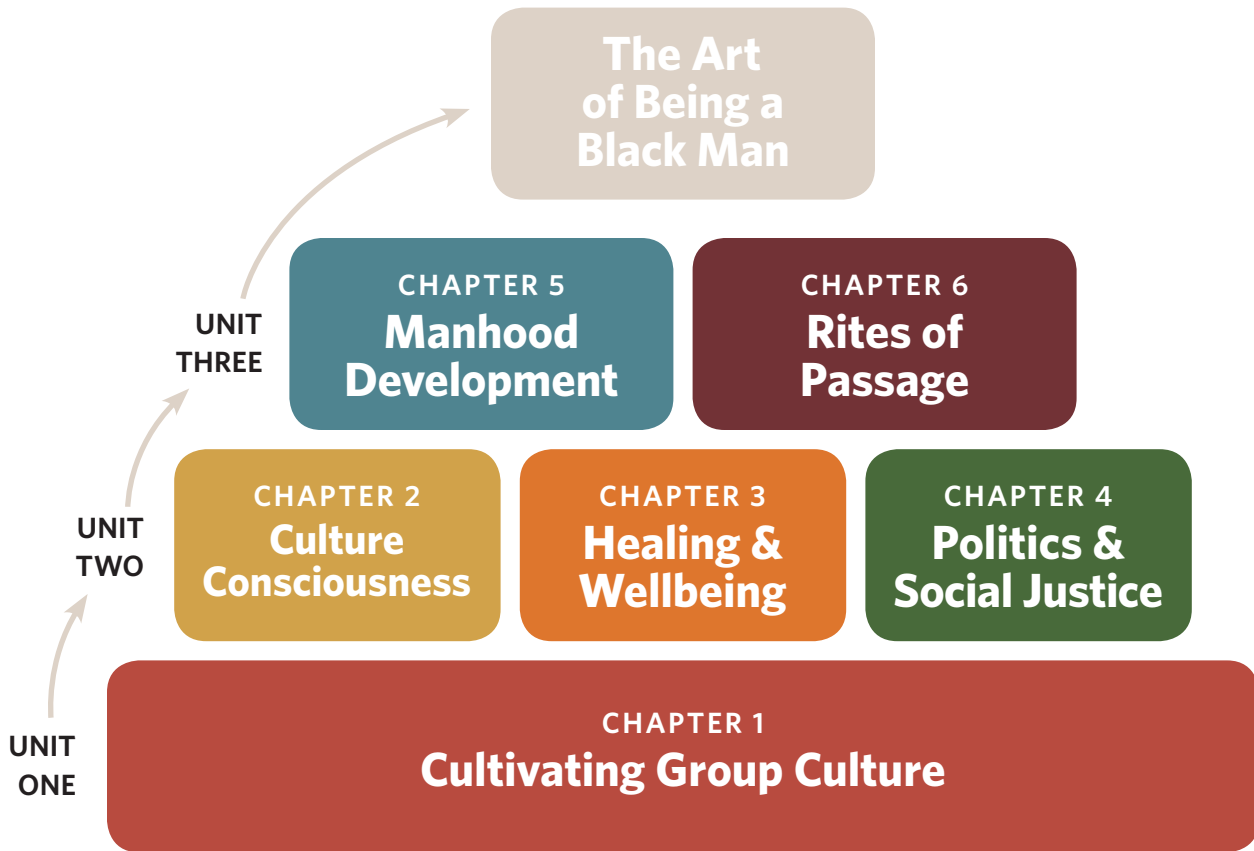
We offer this tool kit in the spirit of *ubuntu*! May we roll up our sleeves and revel in the Art of Being a Black Man.

Shawn A. Ginwright, PhD

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HOW TO USE THIS HANDBOOK

This curriculum includes activities in six areas important for the development of African American young men. While each unit can be used at any time during the process, we recommend beginning with **unit one** activities, then move to **unit two** and finally **unit three** activities. Each unit is also color coded, and corresponds to the units identified below. This curriculum handbook is supported by additional resources, handouts, and Powerpoint presentations at **THEARTOFBEINGABLACKMAN.COM**. We encourage you to register at our website for updated materials and resources.

Building Blocks for Units

The Art
of Being a
Black Man

UNIT
THREE

CHAPTER 5
Manhood Development

CHAPTER 6
Rites of Passage

UNIT
TWO

CHAPTER 2
Culture Consciousness

CHAPTER 3
Healing & Wellbeing

CHAPTER 4
Politics & Social Justice

UNIT
ONE

CHAPTER 1
Cultivating Group Culture

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Cultivating Group Culture

The success of any instructor in establishing the level of trust, vulnerability, and honesty that is required to engage Black boys and young men in a critical reflection of who they are, how they got here, and where they want to go depends largely on the classroom vibe that is established early in the year, and reinforced throughout your journey. The activities in the first four sections will help instructors to: ensure everyone knows each other's names, deepen relationships by sharing about each other, and establish group agreements and norms to support one another in deep discussions. In the last four sections we offer exercises to help reinforce the idea that the entire community of participants must engage, share, and contribute for the journey to be successful.

We offer four activities per topic in this section so that facilitators can establish strong community in the beginning, then revisit this section when your sense of community seems to dip, when participants lose motivation, or you just want to take a break from the serious work of becoming men and have some fun. The debrief questions in each section could be used at the end of any activity in that section. These debrief questions serve as a starting point—facilitators should add additional questions that are relevant to the group experience.

SOME HELPFUL TIPS FOR THE FACILITATOR:
- **Take risks.** Your participants will risk as much as you, so model everything, play every game.
- **Share deeply and honestly.** Whenever there are opportunities to go deep, offer your participants a look into who you are, what you stand for, and what you care about. Share your challenges with your participants, which will make them more open to sharing their own.
- **Validate everyone's needs and experiences.** Even when participants' behaviors seem to take the group off the target you are aiming for, look for what is motivating your participants' choices, validate their needs, and try to redirect their behavior.

Introducing Me

mie : I, Me [Swahili]

Bob Marley isn't my name. I don't even know my name yet.

—BOB MARLEY

- Participants will learn each other's names.
- Participants will learn about what is important to other members of the group.
- Participants will begin to take risks with each other by getting silly and creative with the group.

ACTIVITY
Artifacts

1. Have participants **form a seated circle**.

2. Ask each person to **find an item** in their wallet, backpack, or something they are wearing that says something about who they are *(i.e., a necklace they always wear, deodorant they always carry in their backpack because they are an athlete, or the picture of their mom that is their cell phone screenshot)* and **place it on the altar**. The altar is a sacred area or fixture used to hold items that carry a certain significance for a community. Often in our neighborhoods when we lose a loved one, we place teddy bears, cards, pictures, letters, and bottles on street corners to commemorate that person's life; this, in essence, is an altar.

3. Once each person has placed something in the middle of the circle, have each person **select an item** that is not theirs.

4. Ask participants to **take a minute to think** about who the item might belong to and what it represents to that person.

5. Go around the circle and have each person **guess whose item they think they are holding and what it represents to them**. Remind them to use peoples' names as this will help build a sense of community. If they don't remember the person's name, encourage them to ask so everyone can hear it again.

6. After each participant makes their guess, ask that person to **confirm** whether or not they are the possessor of that item.

7. If they are not the owner of that item, have the actual person **introduce themselves and explain** why that item is important to them.

ACTIVITY
Function!

1. Have participants **form a standing circle**.

2. Ask each participant to **invent some action to go with his name** (a fist in the air, a dance, a pose, or gesture) that will tell us a little bit about how they function in the world.

3. Then go around the circle and have each participant **say their name and demonstrate** their action to the group.

4. Now ask the group to **repeat** the name and action together.

5. This **continues** around the circle until each member has "performed" everyone else's name and action.

6. Close the activity with a **speed round**—have the whole group say each person's name and perform their gesture.

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