

**The
Laundromat
Project**

**POWER
OF
PERCEPTION**

**Creative
Community
Guide**

INTERACTIVE ARTS- BASED DIALOGUE IN COMMUNITY

“We believe it is a basic human right to use our imaginations in the service of a better life.”

– Risë Wilson, Founder, *The Laundromat Project*



Aiming to create spaces for community conversation and creativity, the *Power of Perception Creative Community Guide* was created by The Laundromat Project (The LP) and our partnering artists and consultants, building on the documentary film *American Promise*. The LP is a community-based organization that brings art, artists, and arts programming into laundromats and other everyday spaces, thus amplifying the creativity that already exists within neighborhoods. This creativity can build networks, solve local issues, and enhance a sense of ownership in the places where we live, work, and grow.

First and foremost, we recognize and value the abundance of resources already present in the communities we serve—creativity, knowledge, skills, and solutions to everyday challenges. We believe in a people-powered pedagogy based on five core beliefs that are woven into each of our programs. Over time and through creativity and art making, we are working to:

- Shift our visual landscape to include more images that are relevant to and generated by the people in our neighborhoods.
- Activate communities’ narrative power to tell the stories that are most important to them.
- Help neighbors share the best aspects of themselves.
- Envision collective solutions to issues impacting our communities.
- Conceive and create a more just world with and for one another.

Whether in a neighborhood coin-op, community center, street festival, or classroom, The LP's intention is to create learning laboratories where people activate their own creativity, art making, curiosity, and sense of positive change to become lifelong change agents in their own communities.

Working with American Promise

Films provide pathways to understanding some of the most complex nuances of the human experience. In the documentary film *American Promise*, viewers witness Idris and Seun attempt to navigate the rocky terrain of childhood, family, young adulthood, and both public and private schools against the backdrop of New York City. As responsibilities and expectations mount, viewers watch two young men and their families attempt to balance race, class, culture, education, and wellness, in a sometimes challenging environment.

The realities of most of U.S. cities make Idris and Seun's story relevant to communities across New York City and beyond. *American Promise* resonates with those who value education, family, and community, and it also speaks directly to those impacted by or working to improve the achievement and growth of Black boys. Idris and Seun's story is a collective one that clearly illustrates why families, schools, institutions, and arts and cultural groups should work together to protect, educate, and prepare young people for success.

We believe that viewing *American Promise* provides an opportunity for collective, creative problem solving and visioning about education equity and Black male achievement—cornerstones of community empowerment. Infusing art into the process of envisioning change in local neighborhoods empowers people to think boldly and outside the box when it comes to activating a strategy that will impact quality-of-life concerns such as education equity. This guide will help you hold these conversations in your community.

SCREENING OVERVIEW

1 PRE-PLANNING

2

3 VIEW FILM

4 POST-SCREENING DISCUSSION

5

6 NEXT STEPS



**PRE-SCREENING
DISCUSSION &
ACTIVITIES**



**ARTS-BASED
ACTIVITIES FOR
INTERACTIVE
DIALOGUE**

GETTING READY

Your community is a deep well of creative power! Just watch what happens when you gather your neighbors together to view *American Promise*.

HOW TO START

How can collective and creative expression positively impact a community?



Host your own viewing party by :

1. Gathering your neighbors together to share food and watch the film.
2. Letting your neighbors know that you will be discussing education reform and youth empowerment.
3. Opening the event with an icebreaker and one or more of our pre-screening discussion questions and activities (p. 10).
4. Providing a comfortable space to view the film.
5. Using one or more of our interactive arts-based activities to get people creatively involved in a conversation after the screening (p. 12).
6. Creating time for people to discuss and generate action steps to keep the conversation going.

Make sure to have appropriate child care, and you are ready to begin!

Sample Agenda

Film run-time: 135 or 80 minutes

Community conversation: 30 – 90 minutes

1. Welcome
2. Share the purpose for the gathering
3. Use one or more of this guide's pre-screening questions and activities to begin the conversation
4. Introduce the film
5. Screen the film
6. Break
7. Open the floor for a few minutes of initial reactions
8. Introduce the arts-based interactive dialogue activities (p. 12)
9. Allow the community to choose the activity or activities
10. Small-group creative explorations
11. Small groups report back to the larger group
12. Open the floor for a few minutes of dialogue
13. Final words
14. Closing

A Note on Timing

Several versions of *American Promise* are available for use. We suggest using the 135 min. or 80 min. version. Available at: www.rocoeducational.com/american_promise

This guide is flexible. You can choose to use one or more of the pre-screening discussion questions and activities, and likewise can choose to do one or more post-screening activities. You may want to divide this community screening into two sessions or plan for an afternoon teach-in. Feel free to adapt this community engagement work to suit the culture of your community.

People Power

The following people may be present or may help to organize this screening:

1. Host
2. Lead facilitator
3. Co-facilitator/ Teaching artist
4. Emotions monitor/ Therapist
5. Child care facilitator
6. Resource facilitator
7. Community members
8. School Board members
9. School administrators
10. School teachers
11. Education activists/Cultural organizers
12. Local political officials

Space & Organizing

1. Choose a comfortable location for your screening.
2. Collect materials for creative investigation activities.
3. Confirm food and drink provided for the attendees.
4. Confirm child care is available for attendees.
5. Confirm all technical equipment.
6. Test the film screening setup.

Emotional Trigger Alert

This film delves into some critical issues impacting local communities. *American Promise* also shows how families and communities work together to support African American boys and young men. This does not mean the film will not speak to those who do not identify this way. It is important to keep an open mind and try to relate to what the film reveals.

This film could trigger emotional reactions. When possible, it is recommended that a counselor, therapist, or “emotions monitor” be available during the screening. This person should be trained to facilitate conversations about race, class, and trauma, and should be able to support viewers by using a wellness framework that is culturally relevant to the attendees.

QUESTIONS AND ARTS FOR DIALOGUE

Before watching *American Promise*, take a moment to explore your educational experiences with other participants, using the pre-screening discussion questions and activities. Once you have watched the film, dive deeper into the themes of education equity, youth empowerment, and collective action using the post-screening discussion questions and arts-based activities for interactive dialogue.

DIALOGUES BEFORE & AFTER THE SCREENING

The following questions are designed to initiate dialogue about the themes of the film and to prepare the group for further conversation after the viewing. Use as many as suit your group and time availability.

Pre-Screening Discussion Questions

1. Your School System
 - When you think about today’s school system, what comes to mind?
 - Do schools properly prepare students to be creative and critical thinkers?
 - Are schools doing their part to prepare young people to be the next generation’s leaders?
2. Your School Experiences
 - Did school positively impact your life? How?
 - Did school challenge or inspire you to become a better person? How?
 - Did school ever prevent you from achieving your childhood goals?
3. Your Word Lists
 - What words come to mind when you hear the word “American”? Make a list of these words down the left side of your paper.
 - What words come to mind when you hear the word “promise”? Make a list of these words down the right side of your paper.
 - How are these words connected or disconnected in your life?
 - Can you draw links between words in the left- and right-hand columns?

Pre-Screening Activity

1. Fold a piece of paper into three sections.
2. Sketch a drawing that represents who you are today, who you were as a child or teenager, and who you think you will be as a teenager or an adult.
3. Under each sketch write one or two phrases to represent one challenge and one strength you might have at that age.
4. Facilitator leads a group conversation about the drawings and writings to build a bridge to the ideas of *American Promise*. One way this might happen is by discussing some of Idris and Seun’s challenges and strengths.

After viewers share their initial reflections on the film, choose two or three questions for discussion before beginning the arts-based activities for interactive dialogue.

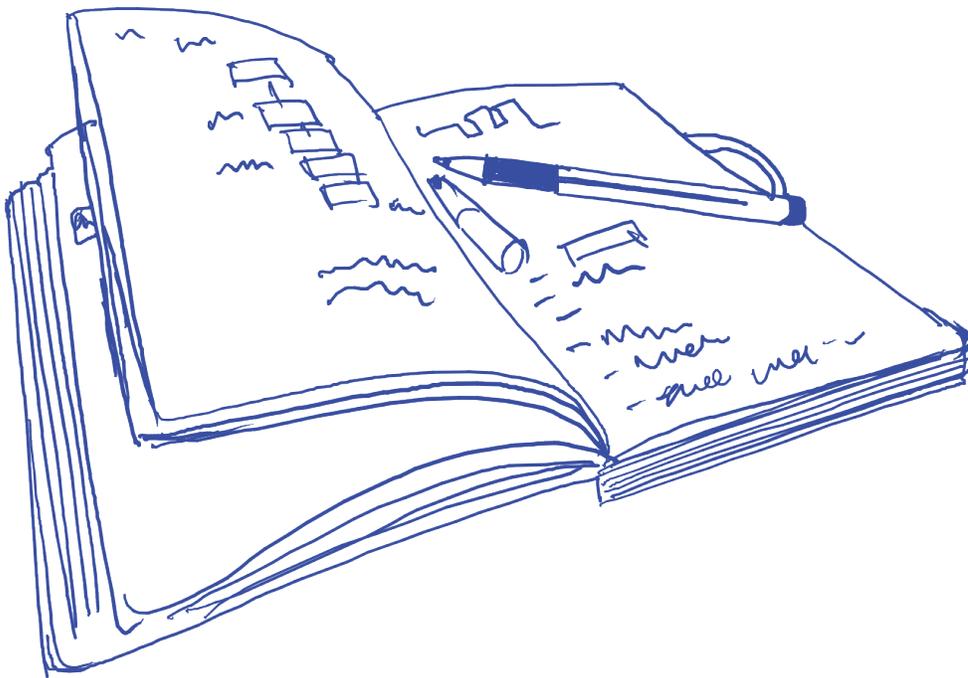
Post-Screening Dialogue

1. Talk about a scene that most resonated with you.
2. What were some of the most frustrating moments in the film?
3. What were some of the most heartwarming moments in the film?
4. Where did you want to step in and change a situation in the film?
5. What situation would you change? How would you change it?
6. Discuss the role of family in the achievement and support of Seun and Idris.
7. What strategies can community members use to support the achievement of Black youth? How can these strategies be implemented?

Post-Screening Arts-Based Activities

The following section outlines activities that are designed for communities to actively engage in creative dialogue about the topics and themes explored in *American Promise*. Each activity should take place in small groups, each one limited to five people. You can choose to do just one activity, or you can do more—how you use this guide is up to you!

ARTS-BASED ACTIVITIES FOR INTERACTIVE DIALOGUE



QUILTING OUR COLLECTIVE STORY

What are some ways in which story sharing builds community?



Interactive Dialogue Through Storytelling

Optional Materials

- Chart paper or white board
- Markers
- Pens or pencils
- Sheet paper or journals

Watching a film can highlight shared experiences among individuals and groups of people. Creating a story quilt provides an opportunity for film viewers to identify these experiences and expound upon them in a safe environment. This activity helps film viewers connect the topics explored in the community to their lives through sharing and listening to stories.

Activity Plan

1. Choose three themes from the film that resonate with the group. If time is limited, you may choose fewer themes.
2. Choose a timekeeper.
3. Each person has one minute to tell a story about each theme.
4. The initial storyteller chooses the first theme.
5. The next person must tell a story about a different theme, but has to find a creative way to relate it to the preceding story.
6. The quilt is complete once everyone has told three one-minute stories.
7. Prepare a few ideas to share with the larger group.

STORY SHARING

How can sharing stories support and propel community action?



Interactive Dialogue Through Storytelling

Optional Materials

- Chart paper or white board
- Markers
- Pens or pencils
- Sheet paper or journals for each participant

Activity Plan

1. Discuss the following *American Promise* scenes:
 - Seun and Idris' first day of school
 - Idris and Seun participate in dance class
 - Seun and Idris are selected for tutoring services
2. Based on your dialogue, tell a three-minute story about a time you either felt empowered or disempowered by an educational experience.
3. Choose a timekeeper.
4. During the story, do not interrupt the person speaking. Hold all questions until everyone tells a story.
5. Provide time for cross-talk after everyone tells their stories.
6. Collectively identify themes and ideas that resonated across the group's stories. This can be done by the group as a whole, or by smaller sections of the group and then shared with everyone.

NEW SCHOOL RULES

If you could transform your school, what would you do?



Collective Problem Solving
Through Creative Writing

Materials

- Chart paper or white board
- Markers
- Pens or pencils
- Sheet paper or journals for each participant

American Promise highlights the ways in which issues of race, class, and culture often hinder the learning process, even in progressive learning environments, when left unattended by school administrators and community members. Transforming your school might begin with articulating your desires, wishes, and demands. In this activity, you and your small group will come up with a list of demands and recommendations to re-envision and improve your school.

Activity Plan

1. List the strengths of the schools profiled in the film.
2. List the opportunities for growth for the schools in the film.
3. Discuss your lists.
4. Collectively generate a list of five actions for school improvement, based on the strengths and opportunities you discussed. These actions should consider how to infuse the following into the culture of the school:
 - art and culture
 - youth leadership and youth-led spaces
 - social justice
 - wellness practices
5. Flesh out your list so that it becomes a plan by writing brief paragraphs to explain each of your points.
6. Develop a creative method for sharing your school improvement plan with the larger group.

INTERRUPTING INJUSTICE

How can communities come together to change an issue?



Interactive Dialogue Through Theater

Materials

- Chart paper or white board
- Markers
- Pens or pencils
- Sheet paper or journals for each participant

Think back to the scene when Michèle and Joe invited other families to their home to discuss their experience with The Dalton School. They provided a space for open dialogue so that parents would not feel alone in their struggles, and so that they could work together to improve their children's school experiences. This activity helps us think about how to collectively vision in order to shift injustice.

Activity Plan

1. In small groups, choose an instance of injustice in the film. Discuss the issue and the ways in which it could be interrupted.
2. As a group, create a skit showing:
 - The instance of injustice
 - A community dialogue about the issue
 - An actionable response that interrupts the injustice
 - A dynamic and transformative resolution
3. Each group performs their skit. After each skit, participants identify the following (written on large paper or a white board):
 - The instance of injustice
 - Community response
 - Resolution
4. After all the skits are presented, a facilitator leads a group discussion about the ways in which communities can be empowered to improve their schools.



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www.laundromatproject.org

In conjunction with the film, and in partnership with trusted organizations around the country, the American Promise campaign is working to mobilize families, educators and young people to take part in conversations and actions around how we can better empower our Black boys.

www.americanpromise.org

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www.rockefellerfoundation.org



