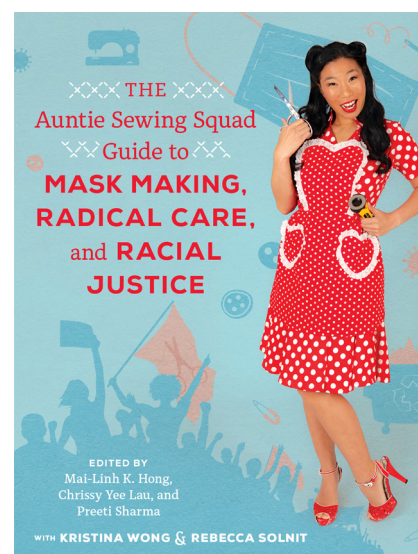


TEACHING GUIDE TO The Auntie Sewing Squad Guide to Mask Making, Radical Care, and Racial Justice



ABOUT THIS TEACHING GUIDE

HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This teaching guide is meant to provide teaching suggestions and resources to understand the core themes of the book, *The Auntie Sewing Squad Guide to Mask Making, Radical Care, and Racial Justice*. This guide is intended for instructors at the high school and college level, activists, community groups, and sewing groups who are interested in discussing and analyzing the different topics in the book. Each section provides a set of goals, scaffolded group discussion questions, and interactive activities for participants. The sections are flexible, as they can stand alone or be grouped with other sections in the guide. The activities in each section range from 30 to 60 minutes and can be paired with an introductory warm-up icebreaker and closing reflection.

ABOUT THE BOOK

Written and edited by members of the Auntie Sewing Squad, *The Auntie Sewing Squad Guide to Mask Making, Radical Care, and Racial Justice* tells an offbeat and powerful story of a mutual aid collective during COVID-19. This collection of essays and ephemera is a community document of the labor and care of the Auntie Sewing Squad. But the book is more than a document: it distills and examines the Squad's activities and culture to offer a critical race and feminist critique of pandemic mask making, accessibly written for a diverse audience. With essays, memoirs, poetry, recipes, visual art, and photos, this book guides readers through written and visual storytelling that supports multimodal teaching.

ABOUT THE AUNTIE SEWING SQUAD

In March of 2020, in response to the United States government's failure to provide personal protective equipment during a new pandemic known as COVID-19, the Auntie Sewing Squad emerged as a grassroots organization to meet a critical need: mask making. Founded by performance artist Kristina Wong, the group infuses volunteer mask-sewing with a bold social justice mission: to protect those who are most vulnerable and most neglected by society. Between March 2020 and September 2021, the group has made and donated over 400,000 masks and counting, mostly to Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities, which were disproportionately impacted by COVID-19 due to structural racism.

FOUNDATIONS

THEMES OF THE GUIDE

The book is divided into five themes and sections:

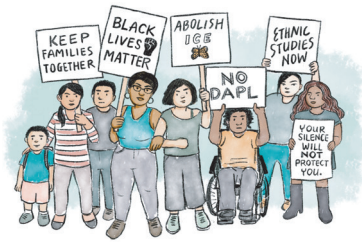
1. LABOR

The section examines how the Auntie Sewing Squad organizes the work of mutual aid mask making in a way that prioritizes care toward both the recipients and the makers of the masks.



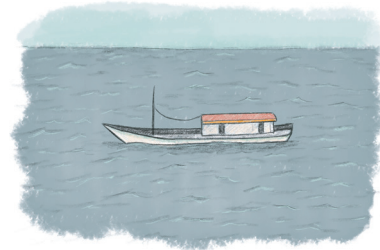
2. SOLIDARITY

The section explores how the Auntie Sewing Squad prioritized Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) communities—who were disproportionately affected by COVID-19—as an enactment of solidarity not charity.



3. SURVIVAL

The section documents how sewing served as a meditative practice for coping with trauma as well as a shared practice of care among refugees.



4. MUTUAL AID

The section journeys through what makes Auntiehood and mask making mutual aid, drawing connections between public health and elderly love and care.



5. POSTERITY

The section reflects on teaching sewing, as well as an ethics of care, in the classroom, between sewists, and across generations.

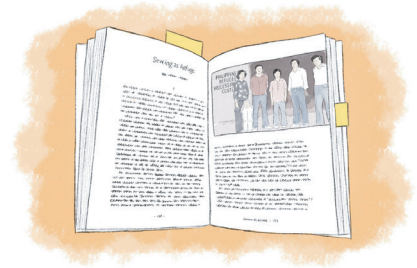


FORMS AND GENRES IN THE BOOK

The book, *The Auntie Sewing Squad Guide to Mask Making, Radical Care, and Racial Justice*, is an anthology with several different written genres and art forms. Here are a few suggestions on how to read:

AN ESSAY

The longer, critical essays are writings that explore one main topic in-depth through research and inquiry or personal reflection as it relates to a major theme about the Auntie Sewing Squad; the shorter, creative essays offer a small glimpse into personal experiences or viewpoints into a topic.



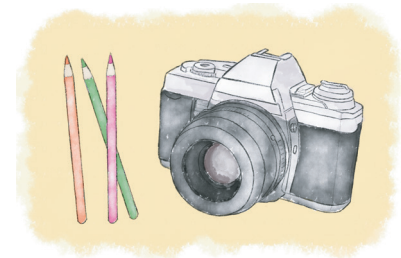
A POEM

Poems are writings that use imaginatively composed text to share ideas and/or emotions around a theme on the Auntie Sewing Squad.

Dear Spreadsheet, unseung hero, I sing your praise,
even while my eyes glaze over,
transferring names from campaigns,
row upon row column upon column,
ashes to ashes ASSES to ASSES,
assessing the goal, the pledged, the delivered, the remaining, the
outstanding,
outstanding in our field
which is not the field any of us thought we would be standing in,
because no one saw this particular apocalypse coming,
and no one thought it would be Aunties
holding up the sky when it falls again and again.

A VISUAL PIECE

The visual pieces are an art form that use drawing, painting, and/or photography to create an image, illustration, or graphic of Auntie Sewing Squad members' lives.



A RECIPE

The recipe offers step-by-step instruction of a homemade item such as food or skincare shared as a form of Auntie Care among the Squad members.



WHO ARE AUNTIES?

OVERLORD: Kristina Wong founded the Auntie Sewing Squad at the start of the pandemic, as she began making masks for friends due to the severe lack of available face coverings, and the urgent requests for more and more masks every day. She used the persona of “overlord” ironically to point out how Aunties were doing the government’s work. Wong is a performance artist, comedian, writer, and elected representative.

AUNTIE ROLES: Aunties contribute in a variety of ways—sewing, cutting, haggling for supplies, keeping spreadsheets, working with community partners, or providing “Auntie Care”—and anyone could contribute without any prior sewing experience. A core role was the “Sewing Auntie,” or someone who sewed masks and served all the other roles primarily supporting mask making and distribution.

SCALE OF AUNTIE SEWING SQUAD: The Aunties were all over the United States, but some Aunties were closer to each other and lived by hubs. At its peak, the national network consisted of over 800 volunteers.



KEY TERMS

ASIAN AMERICAN FEMINIST “MANIFESTO”: A manifesto is a document or statement highlighting an organization’s analysis of social conditions and their beliefs on how to address them. Rooted in Asian American feminist ideals, the Auntie Sewing Squad authored this manifesto (see “Introduction”).

AUNTIE: A cultural figure for communities of color who often provides care, support, and aid in a kinship or honorary kinship role; the auntie holds a social role outside of the nuclear family unit—because of this, the auntie can move between and even connect households (see “Introduction,” “Sewing the Pieces Back Together”).

SEWING: Historically and long-undervalued craft and skill associated with women of color and immigrant women, for different types of garment creation and production (see “Introduction,” “Sewing as Care Work”).

SQUAD: A nod towards the political gains made most recently by women of color in the U.S. House of Representatives, also a collective coming together for the purposes of a shared goal (see “Introduction”).

CORE VALUES: The Auntie Sewing Squad operates based on a list of eight values, rooted in transparency, passion, humor, and kindness. Written by Overlord Kristina Wong and Super Auntie Amy Tofte, they state how the Auntie Sewing Squad prefers to be obsolete, work collectively, and have a direct connection to the communities they are supporting. Also, the Squad values our Aunties as people first (see “Auntie Sewing Squad Core Values” for full list).

RADICAL CARE: Acts of care and worth rooted in giving, healing, and survival. In the case of the Auntie Sewing Squad, this is demonstrated to be rapid mask distribution without placing any expectations nor requirements on the recipient. In particular, masks affirm a person’s inherent worth through protection (see “Sewing as Care Work”).

MUTUAL AID: People providing care and sharing resources in a coordinated way to meet each other’s needs. This is based on a shared analysis that the systems currently in place have failed to meet them (see “Introduction,” “Sewing as Care Work,” and “Sewing the Pieces Back Together”).

COVID-19: The emergence of a new coronavirus disease that resulted in a global pandemic in the year 2020. The pandemic exacerbated existing inequalities within the United States and rather than treated as a healthcare crisis, became highly politicized under the Trump administration.



OPENING

ICEBREAKER

This icebreaker is meant to introduce participants to each other and to get participants acquainted with the use of the term “Auntie” in the Auntie Sewing Squad.



ACTIVITY: REFLECTING ON THE WORD “AUNTIE”

Ask all participants to reflect on the word Auntie on their own. First, ask them to describe what makes someone an “Auntie.” Second, ask them to think about a story about an Auntie in their own life.

Give the participants five minutes to journal out their responses. Then, ask the participants to go around and share their responses. Depending on time, the facilitator can focus on one question only.

Afterwards, the facilitator can highlight how the Auntie Sewing Squad uses the terms “auntie,” “sewing,” and then “squad.” The facilitator can also ground participants by sharing a description of the Auntie Sewing Squad.



THEMATIC SECTIONS

1. LABOR



GOALS:

To link notions of care, labor, and the mutual aid work of mask making in the pandemic



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What is the relationship between care and mutual aid? Do you think practices of care should be incorporated into efforts of mutual aid?

What are the different forms of labor in the Auntie Sewing Squad? What are the different forms of care in the Auntie Sewing Squad?

Why is Auntie Care an important value and practice in the Auntie Sewing Squad? To Aunties?

How does humor get used in the Auntie Sewing Squad? How do you make sense of performance artist Kristina Wong calling herself “Overlord”? Additionally, what do you think about Wong calling the Auntie Sewing Squad a “sweatshop”?

What was the impact of COVID-19 on the garment industry? How are the relations of the Auntie Sewing Squad’s mutual aid efforts different from the conditions in the garment industry?



ACTIVITY: MAKE AN AUNTIE CARE PACKAGE

Materials: Writing Utensil/Device, Paper/Document

Prompt: Imagine that you are putting together an Auntie Care package for someone in the Auntie Sewing Squad, or someone performing short- or long-term mutual aid work. Write out some of the items that you would include. Consider why you will include them, and what they offer in terms of support. Look at the following pieces for ideas: “Taxonomy of Auntie Care,” “The Evolution of Auntie Care,” and “Sewing as Care Work.”

For group discussion: The facilitator asks each participant to share:

- 1) Why did participants include what they did in their Auntie Care package?
- 2) What type of care do the items offer?

2. SOLIDARITY



GOALS:

To understand how the Squad uses “solidarity praxis”



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Why did Black, Indigenous, and People of Color (BIPOC) face more vulnerabilities during COVID-19? Or, how did COVID-19 exacerbate historical and existing racial inequalities among BIPOC communities?

Lau’s essay writes about three introspective forms of solidarity praxis. What are the three forms of building solidarity?

What is your understanding of “solidarity, not charity”?

Looking at the pieces by Badly Licked Bear, Jessica Arana, Constance Parng, and Lauretta Kanahoa Masters, how does one’s identity shape their approach to solidarity?

In solidarity efforts, what is the role of ancestors, mothers, and grandmothers?



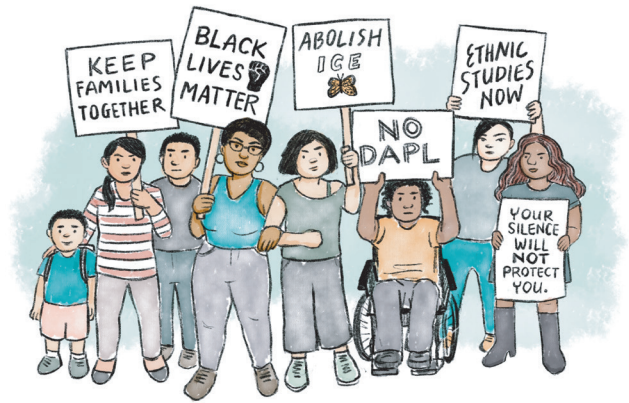
ACTIVITY: ACTIONS IN SOLIDARITY

Materials: Writing Utensil/Device, Paper/Document

Prompt: Write a reflection on one moment when you showed solidarity to someone or someone showed solidarity to you. Or, find an example of when an organization or a group showed solidarity to another community. See the following pieces for examples: “Sewing with Intent,” “Behind the Wheel,” and “Dreaming of My Ancestors.”

For Group Discussion: The facilitator asks each participant to share:

- 1) What moment of solidarity did you reflect on?
- 2) Why did you reflect on this example of solidarity?



3. SURVIVAL



GOALS:

To reflect on the connections between mask making and survival



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Who is a refugee? Please work with Arendt's definition and Hong's definition.

How are Hong and Van Huynh's refugee experiences connected to their work with the Auntie Sewing Squad?

What is the relationship between Van Huynh's incarceration history and his current mutual aid work in the Auntie Sewing Squad?

Hong's essay uses numbers to section off her essay: What do you think the numbers represent? Compare this to Hellen Lee's description of each set of masks to section off her essay.

How did mask making or Auntie Care help Aunties cope with pandemic depression, isolation, and fatigue?

Disability Justice is a movement that centers the lives of sick and disabled people who are queer, trans, BIPOC, and seek to create space and access for all. How do Aunties create disability justice-centered practices around sewing in the Squad?



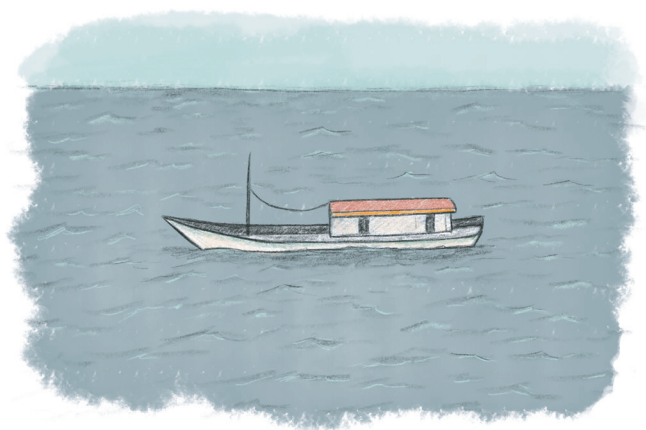
ACTIVITY: RECIPE FOR HEALING

Materials: Writing Utensil/Device, Paper/Document

Prompt: Laura Karlin shares a salve recipe to heal rough hands that cut and sew. Please think of a one way to address pandemic depression or disability justice. Next, create your own recipe, including introduction/context, ingredients, and step-by-step instructions for addressing pandemic depression or disability justice.

For Group Discussion: The facilitator asks each participant to share:

- 1) What metaphorical or literal recipe did you come up with?
- 2) How does this recipe incorporate or address aspects of pandemic depression or disability justice?



4. MUTUAL AID



GOALS:

To unpack the figure of the Auntie in terms of community, support, mutuality, and aid



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

What makes giving a mask a form of “mutual aid”? How does a mask come to represent “mutuality” in mutual aid?

How does the Auntie Sewing Squad rethink the role of the Auntie in the family? In the community? And as resistance?

What part did the Auntie Sewing Squad play in fostering connection and interconnectedness in a time of isolation during the pandemic?

What do you think is the connection between science and mutual aid? (See Karl Haro Von Mogel’s piece, Lisa Prostack’s image)

Are wearing masks a part of a “social contract” in society? Why or why not? How does Joy Park-Thomas’s act of making masks for others also protect her own mother?

The sounds of her grandmother’s sewing machine are a core part of Lorena Madrigal’s poem. How does sound help connect her grandmother’s sewing to Madrigal’s mutual aid efforts?



ACTIVITY: MUTUAL AID ORGANIZATIONS

Materials: Smartphone/Tablet/Computer; Internet; Search Engine

Research: Look up a mutual aid organization. Use Rebecca Solnit’s discussion on the dimensions of mutual aid and on mutual aid organizations to select your example.

For Group Discussion: The facilitator asks each participant to share:

- 1) What issue(s), community(ies), and/or region(s) does the organization focus on, if at all?
- 2) How does this organization demonstrate the role of mutual aid in social justice work?

5. POSTERITY



GOALS:

To break down the different forms of (inter)generational sewing, care, and exchange



DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

Aunties taught other Aunties how to sew masks, often virtually through social media and video calls. What kinds of “sewing drama” do Aunties experience?

Grace Yoo taught the first class on sewing and mutual aid at San Francisco State University. Would you like to see a class like Yoo’s sewing course offered at your school or university?

In their oral histories, students observed that sewing “stitched generations together.” How does sewing connect women, or people, across generations?

When making masks, sewers like Jenni Kuida began to think more critically and creatively about where their fabric comes from and where they are going. What kinds of questions or stories are generated through one piece of fabric?

To teach others how to sew is much more than teaching a skill. What are some life lessons learned and passed down through sewing?



ACTIVITY: YOUR HISTORIES

Materials: Writing Utensil/Device; Paper/Document

Prompt: In the graphic illustrations and comics, “To the Rescue,” “Sewing with Mom,” and “A Day in the Life of a Westside Hub,” each Auntie visually depicts stories of mask-making with their family members for BIPOC communities. Draw a comic about your own history with sewing or with mutual aid (working with others to provide rapid assistance or care in a moment of need or crisis).

For group discussion: The facilitator asks each participant to share:

- 1) What memories or visuals did you incorporate in your comic?
- 2) What aspect of sewing or mutual aid did you focus on in your text or story?

AUTHORS

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