



“This body. This moment. This time. Breathing deeply, listening deeply, and responding deeply.

And you, my reader? What joys do you bring to this moment? What griefs? What deaths are you navigating in your own life? In our world? How might your own body be a source of wisdom and resilience and tenacity? Even in the face of death?”

– Kerr Mesner, “And Now, This Body,” p. 16

STUDY GUIDE GEEZ 58: BREATH & BONE

ABOUT GEEZ

Geez magazine is a quarterly, nonprofit, ad-free, print magazine about social justice, art, and activism for people at the fringes of faith in Canada and the U.S.

Our aim is to nurture a community of faith-oriented folks that are concerned about the environment, peace, racial and gender justice, decolonization, and other social concerns. At best, we offer a prophetic and provocative voice to the institutional church and a pastoral presence to those laboring at the front lines of social change.

The work of *Geez* is storytelling. We believe that stories are crucial to the ongoing struggles for justice – that they are part of what sustains us, gives us rest, and offers hope. Stories come out of movement and can be gifted back to movement. *Geez* is committed to not just raging against oppression, but offering the hope, beauty, and power alive in local communities doing their work.

INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE

Geez 58: Breath & Bone arrives in autumn – the season when the veil between the living and the dead is thin. It also lands amidst a time of global grief surrounding the pandemic and righteous uprisings resisting the murderous culture of white supremacy. This issue explores death and dying in its ordinary, human, and sacred forms. It also summons readers to the communal work of mourning as a form of resistance and liberation.

geeZ **OUT** **Loud** Page 8 – Leaves Whisper of Death by Lydia Wylie-Kellermann

Geez Out Loud is a listening series that offers audio accompaniment by the author for select stories, geezmagazine.org/geez-out-loud. Look for the icon to identify pieces with audio.

HOW TO USE THIS STUDY GUIDE

This is not a normal study guide. We come to this study with both our minds and hearts, but we are aware that this issue sits heavy on our hearts in a way that many other issues do not. We offer this study guide as a chance for community to hold onto one another. It is a chance for stories, for tears, for planning, and always for the ways the heart leads us into movement for justice and liberation. Be gentle with one another. Move slow. Be nourished and blessed by the ancestors.

Part 1: Exploring my Own Death

Part 2: Grieving in Our Homes

Part 3: Mourning in the Streets

In the classroom: Instructors may assign readings and work through the material in parts. Discussion questions can be moderated aloud or assigned as reflection questions.

In a book group: Form a circle of trusted friends and work through the material together. Read excerpts out loud, share reactions, allow the questions to steer the conversation when needed.

On social media: Access a trusted forum or tag friends to spark discussion. Share online articles and pull out quotes from print. Work through the questions with affirmations and challenges that create room for growth. Resist a social media culture of invisibility, arrogance, and attack.

In your journal: Use the study guide questions as prompts to dig deeper into the issue through personal, focused reflections.

To order copies of this issue, visit geezmagazine.org/store.

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PART I EXPLORING MY OWN DEATH

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 30 – To the Soil We Shall Return
by *Lucy Dean Stockton*

Page 31 – Untitled by *Megan Suttman*



Page 35 – File your Paperwork! by
Ambrose Mary Gallagher

Page 39 – Making Final Arrangements for Yourself by *Mark Shatz*

Page 48 – Grieving the Body You're In by *Hannah Foulger*

DEFINITIONS

Green burials: An alternative to Western practices of burial where the body is returned to the soil so that it can decompose naturally.

Advanced directive (also known as a living will): A legal document specifying what a person would like done in the event they can no longer make decisions about their own health.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. How do you feel about talking about your own death? What are your fears, hopes, and desires?
2. What you would like to happen to your body after you die? What are your major concerns and considerations? Is there soil to which you would like your body to return?
3. Even before we die, many of us lose abilities or parts of ourselves. As Hannah Foulger writes, these losses come with grief. What parts of yourself have you had to let go of? Have you let yourself mourn their loss?

ACTIVITIES

1. Go through Mark Shatz's article "Making Final Arrangements for Yourself." Write down notes of your own desires under each category. Start a "Read upon Death" file. Write a will. Plan your funeral. Write your eulogy.
2. Tell those you love how much you love them. Send letters of gratitude.
3. Love your mortal body. Notice the many functions of your body that you take for granted.

PART 2 GRIEVING IN OUR HOMES

RECOMMENDED READING

Cover – Bone Flower by *Meike Hakkaart*



Page 12 – Another American Nightmare by *Renée Cherez*

Page 16 – And Now, This Body by *Kerr Mesner*

Page 29 – All Saints by *Julia Jack-Scott*



Page 33 – Flesh, Fur, and Shell by *Will O'Brien*

Page 38 – The Grave for a Ginger Cat by *Rosalind C. Hughes*

Page 54 – We are Embodied Ancestors by *Owólabi*

DEFINITIONS

All Saints Day: A Christian festival on November 1 honouring known and unknown saints.

Samhain: A Gaelic festival at the end of harvest season and beginning of the darker half of the year marking a liminal time when it is easier to cross between this world and the Otherworld.

Día de los Muertos: a Mexican holiday celebrated October 31–November 2 in which family welcome the souls of the departed into their homes for food, drink, and merriment. It is a day not of sadness but of celebration as it is believed loved ones join the living for a brief reunion.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. What structural injustices have led to the COVID-19 public health crisis, and how have these structural injustices inflicted disparities upon BIPOC communities? How has your neighbourhood experienced and responded to the pandemic? As Renée Cherez writes, these disparities are neither new nor accidental.
2. Unable to gather in community, many of us have been forced to grieve in solitude. How do you center or ground yourself when you are alone with your grief? What words or phrases come to mind? How do you know when you are in the presence of other beings or ancestors?

ACTIVITIES

1. Carve out time for quiet, rest, crying, and healing.
2. Build an altar in your home or yard – a place to hold your grief, pictures of ones you loved, symbols of the departed. Turn to Owólabi's piece for further direction or inspiration.
3. Meike Hakkaart grieves animals by intimately holding bodies, bones, and fur and turning them into works of art. Can you touch death and let grief come out in artistic expression?
4. Take an autumn walk and honour signs of death and decay in our ecosystems.

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PART 3 MOURNING IN THE STREETS

RECOMMENDED READING

Page 9 – *Elderword* by Bill Wylie-Kellermann

Page 10 – *Where Death Lives* by Frank Scoffield Nellessen

Page 18 – “Mourn and Organize” by Erin Cutler



Page 19 – *Community Acts of Remembering and Resistance* by Susie Henderson

Page 41 – *When the Unthinkable Happens: A Litany for When We Gather and Weep* by Angela Denker

Page 45 – *Vigilance* by Mx Chris Paige

DEFINITIONS

Grief vs mourning: William Stringfellow distinguishes grief as all that is suffered privately within one’s self, and mourning as the acts that are public and communal.

Litany: A form of Christian prayer that is repetitive and read together as a community.

Death doula (or death midwife): A community member who assists with the dying process, helping families recognize death as natural and important.

QUESTIONS FOR DISCUSSION

1. Public mourning has a way of disrupting the status quo imposed by structural power. Where have you seen the transformative power of grief in your own life or throughout historical movements?
2. Frank Scoffield Nellessen writes about the places that death lives in his community. Where does death live in your neighbourhood or city, and how does it get in? Does it attack, creep, or whisper? Does it hide behind closed doors?

ACTIVITIES

1. Create a public altar in a park or a front yard and invite the community to add photos and mementos to it.
2. Write a eulogy for the coronavirus, capitalism, white theology, patriarchy. Read it to the wind.
3. If you are able, get your body into the streets. Show up at a protest as an act of communal mourning. If you aren’t able to march in the streets, find another way to publicly mourn as a sign of resistance.

“So dear friends, let the leaves fall and the breeze come. Build an altar. Bake his favourite foods, study her face in the tattered photographs, and delicately finger their old mementos. Gather around the fire and tell some haunted tales. Carve a pumpkin and carry the communal fire into your own hearth. Put the gardens to bed and delight in the sweet taste of her last harvest. Toast and roast the ones you love. Clear the gravesites. Sing, remember, give thanks. Weep and wail. And feel the fallen leaves beneath your feet and trust that life will come again.”

– Lydia Wylie-Kellermann, “Leaves Whisper of Death,” p. 8