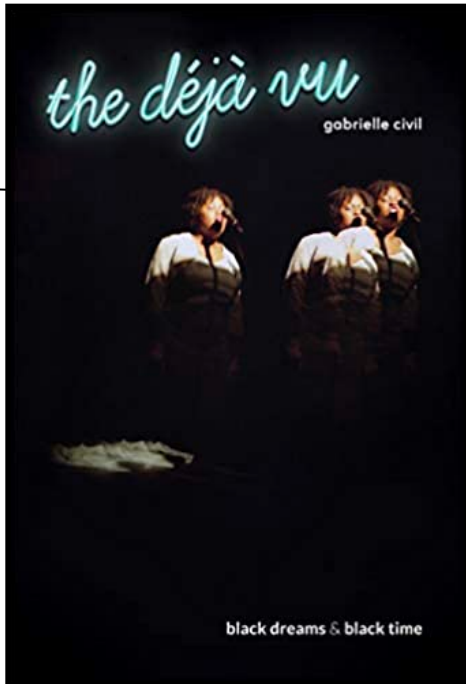


gabrielle civil's *the déjà vu:*
black dreams &
black time



Recommended Classes:

- performance / interdisciplinary studies
- creative writing
- black feminist praxis studies
- protest art / liberation studies
- african American / black diaspora studies
- gender / women's / queer studies

Keywords:

performance art / black feminism / black women artists / academia / race & gender in art / queer studies / atlantic studies / caribbean studies / comparative literature / memoir / ritual / phenomenology / documentation / time &

space / ancestry / archive

TEACHING GUIDE

by LM Brimmer

Welcome! Please **feel free** to choose one or many of the discussion questions or creative activities. *May these be activations for your classroom, book club or writing circle. Please know they **welcome modification**.*

feel free take care of your body, your breath, make a note, get distracted, make bad (or good!) visual art, allow ease, be patient, make it a teachable moment with room for hydration, make a flex an association, find the risk, the offering, notice and move through the portal, reflect and choose respect, eat the chocolate cake, release, take it slow, return, allow ancestral or altar practice.

welcome modification. By which I mean access, learning outcome, artistic discipline or other material or spiritual need-based modification is welcome.

Collaboration is a core tenet

of this text. Therefore, these prompting questions & practices are open to collective discussion, or group investigation, in addition to solo play.

Also, **the déjà vu isn't necessarily linear**. You might find that non-lined pages, movement exploration, and/or associative conversation works better for discussing the ideas in this text. Be open and curious in your approach to black dreams & black time.

May what happens be a gentle reckoning. — 2/22/2022

Discussion Questions

1. **Acknowledge elements of style & composition.** Notice the compositional styles and formatting that Civil uses in order to weave the book together. Although there is a narrative of Gabrielle's journey through academia, stage performance, and personal/professional life, there are other stylistic features at work in this book. *What are the different patterns, rituals, sequences, visual elements (such as font), lyric and line level moments that convey her/our times and dreams. Identify specific pages, passages, and moments. Discuss how the moments contributed to the overall meaning and tone of the passage and the déjà vu as a whole.*
2. **Define déjà vu.** In the title essay, Civil readies her readers for the journey ahead with the etymology of *déjà vu* from its French language origin of 'the already seen', and in her own words pushes the definition of the phenomenon to describe 'repeatings', or 'experiential echoes' (5-15). *Reflect on this essay, this term, and make connections to later chapters, performance pieces and the overall order of the text. As you have started to build a definition of déjà vu, what passages gave you a sense of it? How?*
3. **Identify personal touchstones & collective portals.** Civil's work takes on recent, potent collective experiences that include the coronavirus pandemic & the George Floyd Uprising. She also inventories various moments in her life that has impacted her experience as a black queer woman interdisciplinary artist. Meanwhile, she shares evidence of performances and relationships across time and space. This is a particular kind of intimacy. One that begs acknowledgement. *First: Consider the personal and collective moments mapped out in Civil's text, what moments stuck out most to you? Why? You may find a range from the metaphysical and ancestral, to the historical and performative. Second: You may map these out in thought bubbles - draw connections from these moments to your own first-hand and ancestral experiences; this may include a land/lineage acknowledgment, or other form of research. Go Deeper. Draw attention to collective echoes by looking specifically at "On Commemoration" (16) and "Public Mysteries" (174) and take this question broadly What time is it? How do we know?*
4. **Quantum maps of our literary ancestors and relatives.** This book contains many epigraphs, excerpts and discussions of citations from other literary texts. Some of the individuals included in the text have personal/professional relationships with Civil, others are tethered by identity and theme. For instance, Caribbean diaspora sibling Alexis Pauline

Gumbs might be both! And still others are folks like Prince are associated by thought but no longer here with us in body. *Take a look at the text and find a few artistic figures and discuss their contributions to the déjà vu, Gabrielle's journey, or the collective experience of black dreams and black time. You might find a little research into the subject, passage, or artistic figure. Google, a specific database, or conversations with elders are a great opportunity to deepen your understanding and connections. Similar to discussion question #3 you can map these thoughts out in bubbles, or acknowledge any other personal or collective resonances.*

Creative Prompts

1. **tarot practice.** On page 131 we meet a forty one year-old Gabrielle at a self-proclaimed crossroads opening up for a tarot reading. Tarot cards are divination tools. Each set is unique but they usually combine number, suit, and/or archetype alongside visual art. Gabrielle speaks openly about negotiating the simultaneity of illness and family medical history, maternal aspirations, and an ownership of her artistic vision. *Whether in a group setting or solo reading, set a timer for 5 minutes and get present with yourself. Write down, share out loud, or simply notice in thought what you are dealing with in life, love, work, etc. and list a few questions you have about the path ahead. This is your query. Clear your deck of any previous intentions, name your query, and pull a card. Reflect. If you need clarity you can pull a few more. You could also pull a combination of 2 (past future, logical emotional) or 3 card spreads (situation action outcome; you, your path, your potential; Option 1,2,3; mind, body, spirit). If you need access to a tarot deck, or guidance on how to do a tarot reading you can tap personal network, check out your local metaphysical shop, or surf the internet. Recommended deck: The Black Medusa Tarot from poet Casey Rocheteau (in honor of Civil's hometown, Detroit, MI).*
2. **oracle practice.** This practice is inspired by Alexis Pauline Gumbs' *Spill* and invites us to check in with different ways of knowing and divination. *Choose an intentional question through freewriting, conversation or meditation find your query. Once you've identified it, sit with the book for a minute, imagining the query. Flip the book open to a page and use your intuition to choose a passage from the text that resonates with your question. Land on a black or blank page and try again. Check in with your gut intuition. Read & reflect: How does the word, line or passage that's been pointed to challenge or advance your thinking on the given question? Look to the pages around it for more clues if you feel stuck. Journal in response and/or discuss what came up with a partner or group. Again, this activity can be done solo or as a group. Make it a game: Participants write down questions and one at a time is selected and read out loud for a 'reading' and discussion of individual and collective interpretations.*
3. **timeline practice.** As Civil shows us in the essay "BLACK TIME", time is fluid. In *the déjà vu*, we are "within a spiral of BLACK TIME / repeating and changing / reckoning and grieving" (227). At times time it is non-linear, it is cultural, and complicated. Sometimes we have an excess others we have to fight to find it. *For this creative project create a timeline with entries or notes from a personal or culturally relevant process, 'event' or space. As you record, think about geography, myth and the collective as well as the milestones, people and items involved. Consider it an experiment to see what emerges from the challenge of piecing together an ancient or not-so ancient story. What are you revising? Connecting? Forgetting? For each entry, how do you introduce, analyze, and respond to the various moments you've collected? What systems can you create to compose 'a spiral of BLACK TIME' that makes sense to you? How can you share it with others? Pay attention to compositional elements: from visual appeal (font, style), pay attention to*

syntax (sequence and revelation) and pay attention to poetry (figurative language, meaning). Your timeline may go through a drafting and revision process so don't be afraid to get creative with it.

4. **dream practice.** Civil emphasizes and important acknowledgement in *the déjà vu* that “dreams tell us that rest is not passive” (270). Dreams figure so sharply in the telling of this book that it calls us to deepen our dream practice by drawing closer attention to our current dreams, and sharing them more broadly. For this practice create a dream journal or dream exchange. These dreams can be your sleeping dreams or waking ones. Reflect on the following prompts: *Dream Big: What dreams do you have for yourself, your career, your family, your heart? Build a list. Dream black: If you are black, what are your black dreams? What are your dreams for your self and your community? Write them down. Dream Journal: Journal your dreaming dreams, the ones that come while you are sleeping. Take stock of the bizarre, acknowledge the symbols, research and hydrate. Your dream journal can be of the private or public sort. Imagine: In either of the three practices, how might you illuminate your dreams to share them with others? Who is your audience and is there a message? What mediums make sense for this work (poetry, digital art, slideshow, zine? Remember, drafting and revision can take a simple reflection a long way.*
5. **epistolary practice.** An epistolary is a literary form in the shape of a letter. Like many of Civil's other books, this text engages in letter writing and the sharing of personal correspondence (both real and imagined). These treasured passages invite us as readers into animated conversations between colleagues, lovers, friends. This create an arc of great intimacy within and across the pages of the text. *For this activity, write a letter to a creative friend of yours. It could be someone you met before the pandemic or inside of it. Maybe it is a former collaborator you've lost touch with, or even someone you spoke with yesterday. Letters are a great way to deepen connection and spend some focused time with each other, asynchronously, or out of time. We must care for our creative kinships! Stuck on where to start? Brain storm a small list of thank yous, offerings, or even a response to a piece of art you saw online, in a gallery or on the street. Letters can be time capsules. You can include photographs, stickers, or a quote you think the recipient would enjoy. Reverse: You can also write a letter to your inner child, or a previous or future version of yourself — hold off on reading it and come back to it at some later date.*
6. **keynote practice.** Responding to “(banana traces)” (77), *prepare a keynote address, or a speech that relays a main underlying theme, to a specified community you belong to for a real or imagined event. Important questions to ask yourself as you are writing are about key rhetorical principles: who am I, how am I credible here, what messages or experiences are relevant to this group, etc. Have fun with ‘a keynote’ as a form. Who knows, you could be tapped in for this, it could find its way to a zoom workshop, performance art piece, final project, or upcoming classroom visits. Design Big: Stage notes. Slideshows. Audience participation. Be sure to include a practice of grounding, gratitude and goodbye as you reflect on your experiences and knowledges through storytelling.*

FEEL FREE TO POST YOUR CREATIONS, EXPERIMENTS AND INHABITATIONS ON
SOCIAL MEDIA WITH THE HASHTAG #THEDEJAVU & @GABRIELLE_CIVIL

LM Brimmer is an interdisciplinary artist and educator living on Dakota land in Minneapolis, Mnisota. Find them at @leesuhmaroon on IG & Twitter.