**Inclusive Art Vermont**

**Art Access Summit**

**March 28, 2023**

**Keynote Presentation Transcripts**

**KAT REDNISS:** Feel free to keep videos on or off, whatever your comfort level is. You can go in and out throughout the day. I'm going to start right now. Welcome, welcome to Inclusive Arts Vermont's first, hopefully, annual virtual Arts Access Summit. We're so thrilled to be here with all of you. My name is Kat Redniss. I am the Director of Communications and Development here. And I use she/her pronouns. For access I'm just going to do a brief verbal description of myself. I am a pale-skinned white woman. I'm a fat femme with platinum blonde, short bob hair, and kind of big round cheeks. I'm wearing an oatmeal sweater, and I'm in my sun room, which has tons of windows letting in light, and there are kind of neighborhood scenes in the background and some furniture behind me.

I'm so grateful to be here with you all today. I'm just going to go through a few things. We have multiple sessions today, just offering insights, strategies, perspectives, on access in the arts. We'll have ASL interpreters throughout the day, live captioning, which can either be accessed here or if you go in the chat, there's a link if you want to do it in a separate field. And we'll, for any visuals that are shown, we'll be doing verbal descriptions of those.

We'll be monitoring the chat, so you can put questions, comments, thoughts in the chat. We'll also be sharing links in the chat, as well.

Megan and I will be offering tech support. We have an asterisk by our name, so feel free to reach out to us and message us. Also, this is a humans first approach, so take care of yourself. If you need to get up, move around, if you have kids or dogs, or animals, whatever, eat, drink, while we're doing this. This is for you to be present in whatever way you need to be. We're just grateful you're here and showing up.

And, yeah, feel free, again, connect with us throughout the day, and at the end of the day, we'll have the networking session for everybody to introduce themselves, to connect, to answer looming questions or anything like that. So, we want to just briefly begin with a land acknowledgment. We pause to acknowledge the place we exist, connect, and create is the traditional and unsurrendered territory of the Abenaki people. One of five Wabanaki nations, who have continued an enduring presence with this land. We honor the Abenaki ancestors, past, present, and future.

And with that, I just want to welcome you all, we're in for a wonderful day, and I'm going to bring Megan on to introduce our keynote speaker Jen White-Johnson.

**MEGAN:** Thank you so much, Kat. I'm going to begin with a brief verbal description. My name is Megan, I use she/her pronouns. I have pale skin and long, brown kind of light auburnish hair. I'm wearing a blue tank top. I have flower tattoos with like blue ink line work on my right shoulder and some Kinesio tape. My background is blurred, so everything behind me is in soft focus. And welcome. We are so honored to be joined today by [Jen White-Johnson](https://jenwhitejohnson.com/).

Jen is a disabled and neurodivergent AfroLatina art activist and design educator, whose visual work aims to uplift disability justice narratives in design. Jen uses photography, zines, and collage art to explore the intersection of content and caregiving, emphasizing redesigning ableist visual culture. I first encountered Jen's work when it was featured by the Hart Club Gallery in London. They shared a poster that Jen had designed on their social media. It was of a Black fist raised in the air. On the wrist and thumb bad there was an infinity symbol signifying neurodiversity, and below that, text "[Black disabled lives matter](https://jenwhitejohnson.com/Black-Disabled-Lives-Matter-Riso-Poster-with-Stickers-Pack-Bundle)." And there was also a community building component of folks getting together at the Hart Club and printing posters communally and carrying them during BLM protests in the UK. I was deeply impacted by the message, the intersectionality, art building community, and fostering change, and Jen's awesome design work.

It's been incredible to follow Jen's art online and experience how passionate and talented she is and how her heart, activism, and advocacy are truly a positive change in inclusion. Her activist and advocacy work has been featured in dozens of publications like "The Washington Post", AfroPunk, "New York Times", CNN, Teen Vogue, latina.com, Crip Camp, the official virtual experience. In 2020 she was selected as an honoree on the Diversability's D30 Disability Impact List, and was listed on Today.com as one of the 20 Latina artists to watch in 2021. She's also guest lectured and facilitated design workshops at dozens of academic institutions, including Harvard College, Stanford University, Chapman University, Howard University, Georgetown University, Maryland Institute College of Art, Bard Graduate Center, Moore College of Art and Design, Tisch School of the Arts NYU, and the Paul K. Moore Institute on Disability. I'm so truly honored for Jen to lead off the Arts Access Summit with her keynote presentation. Thank you so much for being here today, Jen.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Yeah, this is so this is such an honor. I'm so excited to share space with everyone today. And quick land acknowledgment that I'm on the tribal beautiful land of the Piscataway people in Baltimore, Maryland, joining you from my little small studio in my house. Just a quick image description of myself, I'm a caramel skinned AfroLatina woman, I have my hair up in a little like messy mommy bun, and I'm wearing one of my favorite T-shirts that says "Black disabled lives matter," and Megan was actually just talking about that shirt. So, I think it's so beautiful that you made reference to Hart Club, and that's a really beautiful space that, unfortunately, is closing in London. But definitely they are going to continue to thrive, and they service a lot of neurodivergent folks within their community. So, I'm super happy to uplift that space today and folks who have been so supportive of the artwork and I'm wearing a new pair of earrings that have Frida Kahlo, one of my favorite artists on there. Frida is painted on a beautiful square of pink. I have a gap in my teeth. And I have artwork behind me and all around me, and some of my favorite books by disability activists and advocates. Again, I'm super excited to hold space with everyone, and thank you to the entire Inclusive Arts Vermont team for, you know, just making sure that we can all assemble today in unity, in love, and in radical softness, as we're really talking about making sure that as artists we understand that it's important to disrupt and to take up as much space as possible. Especially when it comes to celebrating and uplifting our disability community. So I'm coming to you today as, you know, a person that lives with ADHD and also an autoimmune disorder, and who's also a mother to an autistic son. And who does a lot of work for uplifting disability culture, arts and culture. And I really think that art and design is really the voice, the weapon that I use to specifically highlight all of the ways that we are underserved, misunderstood, marginalized, but also bringing in the joy that is very much a part of our culture and intrinsically that's very much rooted in who we are as artists. So, I'm excited.

I'm going to share my screen, and I'm going to show some slides that talk a little bit about what informs my practice, what informs my heart work. So, thank you, again, for just joining me on this journey, and you're more than welcome to take screenshots, or take pictures of the slides, and I'm, you know, it will be shared afterwards. I think it will be shared with the community beforehand. As a disclaimer, I do speak a little fast, so for the sake of time I'm going to make sure that I take my time, so everyone can really follow along, especially for the interpreters, as well. And my love to all things accessibility today, and my access needs are currently being met, so I'm ready to go. All right. I'm going to share my screen here.

And if at any time you cannot hear me, please, let me know. Feel free to drop in the chat. And then I would also appreciate like an audio timer, so that way I know that I'm, you know, keeping up with my time and everything.

So, I'm Jen, this is me when I was 8 years old. I still believe very strongly that inner child is still here with me, and I really rely and lean on her for her guidance on those days when I'm lost, and I feel like I really can't find my way. So, I encourage you today to just, you know, look for that kid that you feel is gone, look for them, because, ultimately, they possess so much, you know, joy and wisdom that really continues to carry me and to help to keep me really going on those really dark days. So, I always like to kind of start off with, you know, that was then.

And, you know, as I had mentioned earlier, I have ADHD, and I also have text on my slides for accessibility purposes with image descriptions, and I will provide those throughout my presentation.

And, so, content warning. I will be talking about ableism, racism, preterm birth, anxiety, suicide, racism. But I'm also really going to nestle in the joy that really is important to also uplift, too. Because Black and Brown disabled bodies are constantly very much, you know, used to our narratives being portrayed through this very trauma-based lens, and so I want to make sure that I hold space for those topics, because, you know, we need to be able to kind of talk about those intersections, but also making sure that I hold space for the joy, as well. So I just wanted to be mindful of these topics and folks that may be triggered by some of them. But I'm here to support you, you know, after this presentation if some of the slides may be a little bit jarring. But they are important to uplift and to talk about.

And, so, what really helps to inform my practice, what really helps to inform my heart work, and why I do what I do, and why I'm here today with everyone. So, it's all of you. Community and collective care, I really wouldn't be sitting here if it wasn't for the love of my community, of my disability community, without spaces like this to be able to continue to just, you know, uplift and celebrate and amplify. So, I just wanted to thank everyone for assembling today, and for coming and taking care of each other. Because without us, you know, we really wouldn't be able to do the work that we do. And, so, you see a whole bunch of little smiley faces today. So, I hope that this slide can just bring you a little bit of sparkle and whimsicality. So, I'm super excited and happy.

And, so, I also wanted to quickly show some love to Bell Hooks, who is a really huge, you know, liberator in terms of her educational prowess and background and everything that she stood for, and I really love collage and design, and so I've been doing collage work for ten years, but in the last two years I've been getting back into my collage work and being able to specifically use really beautiful digital illustration techniques, and patterns, to give my ancestors, you know, their flowers. We lost Bell in I think December of 2021, and it was really hard for a lot of, you know, art educators and design educators and social justice feminists and activists because of what Bell, you know, has taught us. So, the image that you see here is a caramel-skinned woman with braids falling, like cascading around her, around her beautiful round face. And she's wearing red lipstick, and she's wearing a gray top. And behind her is this golden arch that is framing her form, framing her face. And then you see pink and green, like a floral-patterned motif. And then it's on a black background.

And, so, one of my favorite quotes by Bell Hooks that really helps to, you know, frame a lot of, you know, the reason, you know, the overall intentions behind what I do is this quote here. So, it says, "One of the most vital ways that we sustain ourselves is by building communities of resistance, places where we know we are not alone." And that's exactly what Inclusive Arts Vermont is for us today. This is a space where we've built the space, but we're continuing to build the space collectively, in an act of resistance, because being unapologetically disabled in America today is still very much an act of resistance, and it's still very much a radical act. A lot of people expect for us to kind of stay in our lane, they expect for us to, you know, be boxed in. And they expect for us to resist their ableist norms, and that's exactly what we want to do. We don't want to comply to this charity medical model, this ableist oppressive model, of what being disabled means.

And I love that I'm not alone, because I'm really not supposed to be here presenting to you today. In 2012 I became a mother for the first time, and it was a very scary birthing experience. Things did not go as planned. I spent the majority of my pregnancy feeling pretty okay, and I was working, and I was teaching, and I was taking the train from Baltimore into D.C., you know, I was just doing my thing. Like many Black women do, they have to continue working while pregnant. They have to continue, you know, supporting their families. They have to continue teaching. They have to continue serving so many others and giving so much of themselves to other folks that they really forget about their own self care.

And, so... let me see. There's something in the chat, I hope that I'm not missing anything. And, so, this slide shows

**MEGAN:** This is Megan really quick. I just wanted to share Julia Harvard wrote in the chat, "Loving your image descriptions."

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Okay, great. Thank you, Julia. So, what you see here is myself, a black and white photograph of, you know, an AfroLatina woman who is holding her premature child, and he's very close. She's doing like a kangaroo skin-to-skin technique, because he was born 2 pounds, 15 ounces. And he's wearing... he has a feeding tube that is attached to his nose. And also a breathing tube. And quite  on the lefthand side you see the same child in an isolette on the day he was born, on October 11, 2012. And he's in an isolette, and he has breathing tubes in his nose, he has various heart monitors that are attached to his chest. And he has on a little baby diaper and multiple monitors that are monitoring, helping to monitor, his vital signs. Because he was born very small, 2 pounds, 15 ounces because I was preeclamptic. My blood pressure was too high, retaining too much fluid, I couldn't feel him moving much inside my belly. This is something a lot of Black women continue to have to deal with. Preeclampsia is the leading cause of maternal death among Black women, and Black women are five times more likely to die from pregnancy-related disorders than white women. A lot of... like this really harrowing statistic is really backed by systemic racism, by inequities to health care. Or Black women, you know, not having adequate incomes. And I really didn't have, you know, I was teaching part time as an adjunct professor, and I had to pay rent, I had to continue paying car insurance, I had to continue paying, you know, to keep the lights on in my townhouse, and I really had to keep it moving. I really had to continue to use my body as this vessel of ableist productivity.

And so I feel that when we aren't really giving Black women the opportunity to breathe and to actually take care of themselves, that the war on Black maternal health continues. Black women are 55% more likely to give birth prematurely, because of systemic racism. And prematurity is the largest cause of infant mortality. And, so,... and this source comes directly from the March of Dimes. The CDC has released some data from 2021 that the maternal mortality rate continues to rise, that women are dying during pregnancy, they are dying after pregnancy, and it's becoming a really toxic space for a lot of women within the health care system.

For those who are advocating for reproductive rights, and also reproductive justice. So, just some quick disability data, I'm going to focus on one statistic that is written towards the middle, the center of the slide, and in bold bright yellow words, I'm going to skip down to the middle with it says, "36% of disabled Black Americans live in poverty. Disabled Black people often have to battle harder to get correct diagnosis and services." Which is true. This is even more true for invisible disabilities such as autism, ADHD, or different mental health challenges, which educators are more likely to dismiss as behavioral issues in Black children than in white ones. And, so, the reason why this statistic is so important is because it really impacts so many folks like my son. And the fact that, you know, disabled, Black disabled activists, like Fannie Lou Hammer, who I have up on the screen, I wanted to take a moment to honor this amazing Black disabled ancestor, who was victimized by a reproductive injustice, you know, specifically undergoing forced sterilization, so this war on Black maternal health and Black disabled women has been around for decades. And the fact that we're still advocating for the needs of Black bodies continues to be really important. I also want to honor Anita Cameron, a Black queer activist, Anita has dealt with racism, sexism, ableism, and homophobia, but she's used her experience of discrimination to specifically uplift her unique intersectional perspective to promote understanding among different groups of disenfranchised people and increase social justice among those fighting for social justice. So, I just wanted to make sure that as I'm talking about this war on Black maternal health, and then also a war on Black women's bodies, Black disabled women's bodies, taking the time to honor our disabled ancestors. And our disabled current, you know, movement workers. Because Anita is still very much alive and well. And I believe strongly in giving her her flowers while she is still with us. And what you see on the screen is an image of a beautiful, glowing brown Black woman who has her hair in dreadlocks, and the edges are kind of cuddled up with gray sprouts. And she's wearing a red Tshirt that says "not dead yet," which is one of her organizations that really helps to uplift making sure that disabled folks feel valued at the end of their lives and that they are not encouraged to suicide ideation, you know.

However controversial that may be, disabled people are not disposable. Disabled people deserve to live long lives of advocacy. And of or of just, you know, being free, being free to just exist. So, I really love being able to uplift our Black disabled movement workers.

So, an estimated 3.5 million Black women have a disability, but research at this intersection is often ignored, and people at the intersection of identities such as race and disability often find themselves left out of the conversation, when only one  and they are often left out of the conversation specifically because only one of  only one dimension of their disability is spoken about. And usually it is something that's very traumatic, or you're only really specifically talking about just one type of disability. Maybe they have a physical disability and we're not necessarily holding space for autistic, you know, people. Or folks who are, you know, who are dealing with chronic illness, you know, things that maybe aren't as apparent. But we need to be able to intersect all of those identities within this conversation of disability. And we need to let them lead those conversations. So, here what you see is Anita Cameron rallying and being arrested in D.C. She's been arrested almost 135 times. You know, just within her advocacy spaces.

And here is another digital portrait collage that I made to just honor her beauty, to honor her joy, and I just wanted to make sure that we continue to uplift our Black disabled movement workers.

And Black disabled women and girls experience economic insecurity at higher rates, often due to job loss, sub-minimum wages, as low as $2.13 per hour for disabled workers and reduced earnings caused by barriers to education and skills development and other challenges. So, you know, all of this data and all of these important intersectionalities between race and disability really help to inform why I need to continue speaking, why I need to continue making sure that the artwork that I create, again, highlights these systemic issues.

And, so, that is what... so, that specific data really helps to inform the mothering as an act of resistance framework. So, as, you know, an AfroLatina woman, a disabled person, and as a mother to a disabled child, mothering and care work and heart work has really become a form of activism. And it's really become a form of resistance.

And revolutionary mothering and art and design. So, here's pretty much my mission statement. So, revolutionary mothering art and design practice is rooted in exploring the intersection of content and caregiving with an emphasis on redesigning ableist visual culture. So, basically creating the work that I don't see. You know, creating and honoring the folks who are unsung, who are being erased, whose movement work is being coopted without being properly cited. Folks like Fannie Lou Hamer and Anita Cameron.

So, what types of narratives about disability do we see in design and in the media, and what are those consequences of those narratives?

**MEGAN:** Jen, this is Megan. I just wanted to give you a time update that we have about 20 minutes left.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Okay, thank you so much.

**MEGAN:** You're welcome.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** So, what you see here on the screen is two infographics that are side-by-side that specifically highlight who is being excluded and why. So, I was talking about the slide before this said what type of narratives about disability do we see in design and in the media. What are we not seeing enough of, and what are the consequences of those narratives.

So, a lot of my work really centers Black disabled children, making sure that they feel valued and seen, making sure that we honor our Black disabled movement workers, and so in kids' literature, the graphic that you see here asks who is represented in kid lit? And, specifically, based on upon the main character. Not just do we have disabled characters that are in books as like the side character or the character that we see as like the super crypt person who can make us feel good about ourselves if we just, you know, let them in on our, you know, let them in the book to make people feel satisfied. But it's like, no, how much space are they taking up? How much agency are they being given to actually be the main character, to be the main protagonist, the main voice, the main body that we're uplifting in these narratives. As you can see, the percentage is very small.

So, the graphic on the right side of your screen says 2019 by the numbers. Main characters in U.S. children's literature. And these are statistics from the Cooperative Children's Book Center. So, main characters in U.S. children's literature, disabled characters only represented 3.4 of all books. And LGBTIA+, that community only represented 3.1% of all books. So, this is in 2019. Now I have the most updated graphic that just came out in 2021. And the percentage hasn't grown by much. What you see is, again, disabled kids, or just disabled people in general, who are being represented in children's literature only jumped from 3.4% to 4%. Then you see white representation is the highest among 33% among who is being represented in children's literature. So, definitely, Black writers are making waves. You know, folks like Kya Brown and so many beautiful voices that are uplifting so much of what we want to see. But they continue to need so much support, and they continue to need the visibility.

And, so, it really starts with making sure that our current generation of disabled kids, and even us as disabled adults, that we understand that disability is not a bad word. We can say it. We can say the word. We don't have to dance around it. We don't have to avoid it. It's not an offensive word. It is an empowering word, and it really helps us to name exactly who we are, and exactly what we need to celebrate. And it is, in essence, our disabilities.

So when my son Knox was diagnosed as autistic at age 3, I began to examine the absence of Black children in digital and literary media. What you see on the slide here is a black and white photograph of a 4yearold, at the time, this Black child was 4 years old, and he's kind of like looking away pensively at something off screen, off camera, and he has this beautiful black curly hair and an afro, and he has this gorgeous smile on his face, and he has these long black eyelashes. And it's like a really tight, closeup shot of him. And I took this image just one day when I was just playing around with my camera, and I just wanted to document his autistic joy. And this photo was taken about a year after he received his diagnosis.

So, when I'm looking at this data of, you know, underrepresented voices within kid lit, children's literature, and I'm looking at so much of my son's autistic joy, and I'm thinking why am I not seeing more of this joy being uplifted, you know, in non-disabled spaces, in, you know, pop culture, in media, and I know it's because we have to eradicate ableism. We have to eradicate this oppression. And I feel like this is the work that we have to continue to do as disabled advocates, and if we really want for inclusivity to be, you know, the norm.

And, so, as I started to examine what was missing in media, I started to just use design to experiment with typography, to experiment specifically with language justice-based designs. So, here you see my son. It's like a portrait of him holding a dyecut sticker. And the sticker says in white, bold letters, all caps, white bold letters. It says "Black autistic lives matter." And it's stroked by like a dark... it's basically white text on like a black background, but the actual sticker is like in the shape of the actual letters. So, he's holding it, he has this fierce look on his face like, yeah, you know, my life matters, my Black autistic life matters. And this photo was taken during the pandemic, when I, you know, just designed the stickers and put them on my shop, and I wanted to, again, uplift the community, because we were losing so many of us.

So, designing to break unjust stigmas, ultimately, has to continue to be the gold and the purpose of, you know, our heart work. To make sure that we can uplift, that indeed, like, disabled kids are radical, you know, beings. We're cyborgs. Our bodies are different than able-bodied people. We have different ways of moving, of existing, of, you know, our essences are just so beautiful and what we can offer to this able-bodied world. And, in essence, we exist in this space of radical joy. And, so, the photograph that you see is my son again smiling. He's got this beautiful caramel skin complexion, and he has this little curly black afro, and he's holding another sticker that says "radical joy" that's written out in scripted letters in pink. And, again, it says "radical joy."

So, seeing this, you know, underrepresentation of, you know, Black disabled children specifically in the media, this really motivated the release of a disability advocacy photo zine entitled "Knox Rocks," published by my great friends homie house press in 2018. You see a zine my friend is holding and on the cover is a photograph of my son and myself and we're on the carpet, and we're kind of tussling, and he's pulling at my blonde-streaked hair. And it says "Knox Rocks" in all caps in yellow letters.

And, so, here you can see a closeup shot of just the photograph that was used on the cover. And at first I really didn't want to put myself on the cover of this photo zine that really helped to uplift his neurodivergent journey, but my editors were like, no, Jen, it's so important that we see the both of you being celebrated and uplifted on this cover, because, you know, what often we don't really see this really beautiful neurodivergent relationship between a mother and her son until it's too late, until either maybe the son is gone, or the mother is gone. So, what does it look like when we can celebrate genuine neurodivergent, disabled joy now, capturing it in this moment while we're still present to hold space for it.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan. I just wanted to let you know we have about ten minutes left.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Okay, great, thank you.

**MEGAN:** Thank you so much.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** So, we have to remember to uplift acceptance. We have to remember that, you know, this photo world that I created in "Knox Rocks," it's very much about his journey and about uplifting him respectfully and understanding. So, here on the screen you see there's an  (background noise)  there's an open zine spread that is on a blue background and it's like a pink page with blue lettering that says "welcome to Knoxverse, where every family's experience is different, but the commonality is that our children are not burdens and didn't ask for the challenges they face, and they depend on those that love to equip them to be successful and reenforce the fact that they are incredibly special and don't need to be fixed."

So, these are just some spreads from the actual zine. So, I only have ten minutes left, so I'm just trying to go through these slides quickly.

So, our differences should continue to embolden us. So, the last few slides that I showed was my son's autistic joy, him beaming with autistic pride, and he's very bold, he's unabashedly disabled and unapologetically autistic. We teach him his beauty, joy, his essence, should continue to embolden who he is.

And, so, autistic joy is very much something that we practice, and that we hold space for in our home. And here is an autistic joy sticker. Again, playing with language justice-based, inclusivity is really about playing with language justice and putting words together that you normally wouldn't see. Autistic and the word joy, folks feel like sometimes they shouldn't be together, because, oh, if you're autistic, you lack empathy, you lack a certain way of being able to express your feelings, and to being able to communicate and have relationships with people. But in essence, if you meet an autistic person, yes, you meet one  you meet an autistic person. But my lived experience is that my son is full of joy, he's full of love, and it's because he's loved, and he understands how important it is to give that love back. These are more slides, more art work. Creating anti-ableist spaces as a graphic design poster. A lot of the designs that I also create are used for protests, artwork, whether for virtual protests or inperson marches or rallies or peaceful protests, where people gather together specifically to uplift the disability community. And the Black disabled lives matter, which is a Black power fist, intertwined with the neurodiversity infinity symbol coupled with the words "Black disabled lives matter" have been translated on to posters, T-shirts. These are a group of my disabled advocate friends in D.C., and you may recognize Carrie Gray in the front, who is an amazing disabled advocate.

My disabled life is worthy. So, again, inclusivity means making sure that language justice plays a huge part in uplifting disability culture, and that we shouldn't be afraid to say words like anti-ableist. And we shouldn't be afraid to say words like disabled in our artwork and in our... in what we uplift to the community. We should name exactly what our intentions are. So the moment we choose to love we begin to move against domination, against oppression. And the moment we choose to love, we really begin to move towards freedom, to act in ways that liberate ourselves and others. So, this is another quote by Bell Hooks that is really rooted in, you know, freedom, ultimately freedom is an act of love. Access is love. And if inclusivity and what we're practicing and why we're here isn't nestled with care and love, then folks are going to be able to read right through that performative, you know, aspect of activism. And this should not be rooted in performative justice. This should be rooted in real access justice. And that's really why we're gathering here today.

And, so, it's important that we continue to value all bodies and minds. And that we continue to, you know, again, challenge educational communities, institutional spaces with manifestos, and last year as I was prepping for an art educators conference, I was able to design and disperse for free the [anti-ableist art manifesto](https://jenwhitejohnson.com/The-Anti-Ableist-Art-Educators-Manifesto), which is where I called out exactly what I want art educators to continue to do for the community. And this is available on my website as a free link, like folks can print it, print out a digital PDF, and they can paste this in their classrooms.

And lastly, one of the ways that I'm continuing to advocate for my son within the school system, which is  like the public school system can be one of the most toxic, you know, exclusive places, is the [advocazine](https://jenwhitejohnson.com/The-Advocazine-Hack-The-IEP), which is my son's opportunity to basically hand his teachers, his advocates, his school counselors, and actual little booklet that allows him to talk a bit about his access needs and, you know, his desires, his wants, his challenges, and ways that he really wants to kind of be valued and seen within the classroom.

And this allows for him to take ownership and agency over, you know, his ability to uplift his own self-advocacy. Again, these are also available on my website, and it's great, because I've been able to get them to educators and have parents use them with their kids, again, to kind of advocate for what their kids need within the classroom lens, they are kind of like in an institution that really doesn't understand how to interact with their disability or their neurodivergence. Again, inclusivity really means being able to use art and design to create radical pedagogy and radical curriculum that's going to help challenge, you know, ableist curriculum and ableist standards that rely so much on standardized testing and standardized rules that these kids, kids like my son, have to abide by.

**MEGAN:** Jen, it's Megan. I didn't know if you wanted to take the last few minutes for questions or wanted to finish your presentation. Whatever you want to do.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Yeah, I'm ready to take questions. Now I'm just showing fun artwork. Like I said, I can't see the chat at all. So, like I'm open to take questions. I have fun little projects that I'm still continuing to work on, like the Society of Disabled Oracles that I wanted to shout out my collaboration with Alice Wong and Aimi. And it's a really beautiful space where disabled folks are encouraged to share their stories with us, to share their wisdom from the past, present, and future. This is a beautiful way to use art and design to specifically... just to uplift our genuine sensibilities and our radical  like our radical sense of selves. Because we understand those warning signs. We know what it's like to create collective liberation, you know, in isolation. But we also know how to gather people together. So, this is one of my favorite projects, where we specifically asked folks to contribute their truths and prophesies and warnings that they want to share with the disability community.

And this is a group of telegrams, basically like digital tarot cards that I was able to create in collaboration with Alice and Aimi, again, to center disabled folks and their truths. Specifically, you know, in how they want to continue to kind of share their stories. If anyone knows Alice, she's a person who believes in archiving stories and archiving our truths. So, this was a really fun project to collaborate with her on.

And, so, yeah, all of this is at the [Society of Disabled Oracles](https://societyofdisabledoracles.com/), so that folks can access these telegrams. And I just wanted to show an example of creative disability collaboration through the Society of Disabled Oracles. But, yeah, the floor is open if folks want to ask questions or comment. I'm on Instagram [@jtknoxroxs](https://www.instagram.com/jtknoxroxs/). Thank you for having me, holding space for my fun artwork. I tried to get through the slides as quickly as I could.

**KAT REDNISS:** Jen, thank you so much. That was so beautiful. I know we're kind of into the  a little into the break space, but it's early in the day, so virtual applause for Jen. Are there any questions, you know, folks are welcome to take a break if they would like now. We'll start the next session at 12:00, but also it's early in the time, so if there are questions for Jen, feel free to either unmute yourself or raise a hand or ask in the chat. Go for it.

**MEGAN:** This is Megan, I can share the chat was very active during your presentation, Jen, and we can share that chat text with you.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Thank you. Yeah, yeah. I'm seeing a lot of... yeah, there's definitely, yeah, tons of books that I can also recommend that have been written by Black disabled folks and that are like, you know, already available for preorder. So, definitely I appreciate y'all for dropping those links in the chat, as well, and different activist spaces. So, yeah. This is really beautiful. Thanks for all your love. Yes.

**KAT REDNISS:** Any burning questions from folks in the audience, I'm just scanning through just to see if there's any hands up. Also feel free to use the chat for any questions.

I want to hear a little bit more about how the advocazine is used. Brilliant, perfect idea. How did it come about?

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Yeah, no, thank you for that question. Basically, with the advocazine, you know, when my son was diagnosed with, you know, as being beautifully autistic, we knew right away that we didn't want for him to be embodied in that oppressive stigma of specifically the stigma that's very much rooted in, okay, well, now it's time to fix your child, now it's time to normalize your child.

So, what we began to do is  since kindergarten we'd create these fun little zines, and the zines would actually be full of information about who he is and about how he wanted to be treated. And how he didn't necessarily want to be seen as less than or disposable or other or excluded. So, we would kind of write this really beautiful narrative together. And, literally, it started  and I'm trying to find some, but they are all the way over there. Hold on. So, it started off in kindergarten, actually first grade. Here is "hi, my name is Kevin." It would literally like start off with his own personal story. And then it would continue with, you know, some of the fun things that he did over the summertime. So, it lists here, you know, this special book and letter is for my new first grade teacher, my school principal, my IEP chair, my special educator. Some of like the things that I did over the summer was I began piano lessons, I began swim lessons, my first trip to Disney. Things that helped to actually make sure that folks know that because he's autistic, he still enjoys life. He still actually is a person. He's not like a charity case. He's not anyone that needs to be treated with disdain. Or he doesn't need to be infantalized or demonized. So we took the opportunity to create these special narratives that were authored by him with our help, that really helped to uplift his joy. And, so, we would  it specifically talked about his challenges, you know, oh, I have a hard time staying focused, and sometimes I lose stamina. I'm also very friendly, happy, and loving and affectionate. Sometimes I have trouble with keeping my distance from people because I'm super friendly and I'm super affectionate, and I don't like loud noises. And I'm not always aware of my body or the spaces around me. So, sometimes I might bump into people. It just really gave us the opportunity to really take the agency and the autonomy to let them know, like, we're present, we're here, and we're ready to practice that self-advocacy. Instead of folks feeling like they can author his own narrative. I'm not knocking, like, you know, any therapists or any folks who assist him in the classroom. Like we love them. But these books allow for us to have really beautiful opportunities and conversations with them. So that if there are any needs that have to be addressed, we can actually put them in the zine, too. And we can add them to his lists of challenges and needs, you know, especially as he's learning to have conversations with folks and sometimes he echoes and mimics, and because he doesn't necessarily think that he can reply or respond in the way that he wants to, but he can. You know, we just have to continue to encourage him.

So, yeah, every year, first, second, third grade, fourth grade, we would make a different one each year. And then I would post them and folks would be like, well, how do I make one for my kid? Then I just partnered up with another graphic design mom, who has a son who's also autistic, and then we just teamed up together to make them available to the public, so that folks can download, print, fill out with their kid, or they can actually fill it out digitally, print it, and then take it to the IEP meetings, which are the individualized education plan meetings, so that the schools can have access to some really beautiful opportunities to have really productive conversations with the kids. So, again, it's just  I think what really helped is I'm a designer, and I'm always looking for ways to kind of, you know, uplift and amplify underserved communities. I'm not really here to solve problems. I'm here to just address and to contribute and to uplift my skills to where I see there's a specific need. You know, so, it's just a way of me using mothering as, again, an act of resistance to kind of help address to make sure that my son's access needs are being met. And I'm hoping that he can continue to create these middle school, high school, and folks have already  educators have already reached out, and we've been to different educational spaces and kind of walked through educators and, you know, special education teachers, we walk them through the process and how to create these with their students, or to kind of talk a little bit about the background and why they could be a really beautiful addition to the relationships that they are forming with their neurodivergent community. So, yeah, it's all still very new in terms of me getting these out into the wide public. But to me that's really what collective liberation is built in, it's like getting these out into the community, now that they've worked well for my kid. I want them to continue to serve other folks. So... and they are available on the website. You can find out all about them. So, thank you for that question and letting me speak on that.

**KAT REDNISS:** Wonderful. Jen, we want to thank you so, so much. Jen's site and all the links are in the chat. We just want to take a quick break. We're a few minutes behind schedule, but thank you, Jen, immense gratitude to you for this just beautiful, beautiful talk and your graciousness and openness and your exceptional artwork. And tons of thank you’s coming in the chat.

Folks, we are going to start five minutes late for the next session, so we're going to give a five minute break, especially because we want to make sure our interpreters and captioner have a break, as well. So, we're going to start back up at 12:05. So, feel free to take a moment, step away from your computer, and we'll resume at 12:05. Jen, thank you so much for everything. Mwah.

**JEN WHITE-JOHNSON:** Thank you, all. Thank you for your solidarity. I'll stake around for a little while.