

## **Koffler Centre of the Arts**

### **Pocket Change Collective 3: Amyra León & Hannah Testa with Huda Hassan**

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Hello. You're listening to Koffler Digital Audio, a stream that encompasses all of our downloadable audio content, including audio walks, radio plays, podcasts, and artist interviews.

It's my privilege to now make some introductions. Amyra León is an author, musician, playwright, and activist. Her work transcends genre and medium and focuses on black liberation, politics, and communal healing. She believes that the art of listening and honest conversation are the primary tools for lasting change, and her aim is to empower communities to believe in the significance of their individual stories. Hannah Testa is a sustainability advocate, international speaker, author, politico, and founder of Hannah4Change, a non-profit dedicated to fighting issues that impact the planet. Hannah has received numerous honors and awards, including the Teen Earth Day Hero by CNN, the Young Superhero for Earth Award by Captain Planet, the Action for Nature International Young Eco-Hero Award, the Gloria Barron prize, and many others. Last, Huda Hassan is a writer, cultural critic, and scholar from Toronto's east end. Exploring the connections between culture, politics, and power, her writing has appeared in Hazlitt, Quill and Quire, Fader, BuzzFeed, Gawker, and more. She is a black feminist interdisciplinary scholar and is currently completing her PhD at the University of Toronto's Women and Gender Studies Institute where she is also the 2020-2021 new college senior doctoral fellow. In 2017, Huda was highlighted as 100 incredible millennial women in Canada by FLARE magazine. Huda, I'm pleased to pass the screen over to you. Thanks, everyone.

Huda Hassan: Hi, everyone. Welcome. Still getting very used to doing moderating or any sort of panels through Zoom. 2020 is a very interesting year. Welcome. I am really excited to be in conversation with Hannah and Amyra. How are you guys both feeling right now?

Hannah Testa: I'm feeling great. Thank you so much for having us. That was a beautiful introduction, and I'm so excited to be talking with Amyra and you, Huda. This will be exciting. Thank you for having us.

Amyra León: Yes, I'm feeling really good, you know, easy with myself, joyous to be here in conversation with you all and talk about the universes we built.

Huda Hassan: Okay. So, let's dive into the conversation if that's cool. If it's cool, I'd like for, well, let me start off by saying I loved both of your books. I got the change to read through them a couple of days ago. They were very easy to get through, and I mean that in the most complimentary way. You guys both obviously dive into very complex and complicated conversations that are very important to our times and do so in a very accessible manner. So, if it's cool, I'd like for you guys to explain your text, your new text, that the audience will be learning about today, so Taking on the Plastics Crisis,

by Hannah Testa, and Concrete Kids, by Amyra León. Hannah, maybe do you want to start?

Hannah Testa:

So, taking on the Plastics Crisis was a little bit about my journey into youth activism, I never really planned on becoming a youth activist. It was really, you know, my purpose is really what my path drove me to speaking out for our planet and I just talk about all through my young age how I realized that my voice is powerful and I can take action on the issues I care about, whether I learn about them or partner with other people to really effect change. I talk mainly about the crisis of plastic pollution and talk about, you know, how it surrounds our daily lives and can be hard to avoid and a lot of times we think of this out of sight, out of mind mentality when we throw it away, but there's consequences of that, so it's really talking about plastic pollution as a whole and why it's such a big problem and that plastic doesn't biodegrade, so plastic isn't a terrible product. I think a lot of people think that when I saw I'm going to talk about plastic pollution I'm saying plastic is always bad, but there's, we need plastic. We wouldn't be here today without the invention of plastic. It sends people to the moon, it's in our cars, it's in almost everything, but too much of anything is always going to be a problem. We use so much single use plastics for just a few minutes and throw away, but those plastics live for hundreds even thousands of years, outliving me, you, your children, grandchildren, and beyond, which is terrifying, and a lot of times we don't think much of it when we throw it away, so it's talking about, you know, plastic pollution of the ocean, talking about how it's connected to the climate crisis, because a lot of times we see those as two very separate issues, but they're very much interconnected and interlinked like many issues facing our world today, and then I also talk about recycling, especially as a young person. I think a lot of us were taught that recycling is the ultimate solution, but it really isn't. We've kind of been led into this story that if you recycle it then it will be a brand new bottle, but that's really not the case, so I talk about the misconception of recycling and on how other people get involved, use the information, and I show them really how to take action to fight the plastic pollution crisis and share some other incredible stories of other young people that are leading the way and sharing that as young people we can really take action on any issue. It doesn't have to be just plastic pollution, but we can really use the power of our voice to speak up and fight for what's important to us.

Amyra León:

Amen. You go, honey. Incredible. I'm so glad that we get to do these together so I can hear you speak, too, because it's such a wonderful thing that I get to prioritize. Concrete Kids. Ooooooooh. Concrete Kids is honestly a snapshot of my life when I was 13 years old growing up in Harlem. I had just been adopted. I was raised in foster care in New York, which is an incredibly isolating experience that is rarely ever spoken about, still rarely ever spoken about. Adoption in the United States is one of the last, you know, human crisis situations in our country. I think a big way that I have found myself impacting change is making people believe in themselves. They asked me to write about something that would ignite

young people who may be facing incredible trials, how to give them a place of solace, and I think that building solace around one's self is an individual practice, it's something that can not be taught, it's something that must be summoned, and so, there are ways, and there are things that can guide you, and there are things that can ignite you and inspire you, but it's something that a very intentional and intrinsic healing must occur to honestly be able to live out, you know, and so Concrete Kids, I realize, you know, whenever I'm working with young people, you try to tell them what to do, it's not the way. You have to listen, you know, and if I tell them, oh, I've been there before, I was with you right there, actually. I know exactly what flavor that story is. I know exactly what you are talking about with your math teacher because I was there, too. I know exactly what you're talking about with this man when you thought that, you know, like, and so the way that I've been able to approach education and the way that I've been able to approach my performance has really impacted the way that I approached writing Concrete Kids, you know. I wanted to be able to share a part of myself that said, look, these things were all true, and I know, I know children who are 10, 12, you know, 14 years old, who are experiencing excruciating circumstances in everyday life and being asked to go to school and get great grades and being asked to go and become, you know, everyday members of a society that isn't prepared to receive their trauma, you know, and I was a regular, regular young girl when I was in my classroom excelling. I was an incredible child when I was after school quiet to myself, not speaking to anybody, but I was going home to a war that I wasn't given the language to describe nor the space to share, you know, and I think the biggest problem wasn't that it existed. It was real. I understood. I said these are my circumstances, this is what is going on. The only way that I'm going to piece myself together a life is by making sure that this don't break me and how it didn't break me was by allowing myself to express myself, and if to no one else to myself, and so Concrete Kids is that. It's that season of my life. I took, I went back, I have journals from when I was 6 years old, like I have always been a writer, and I just went back to some of the poems from when I was, you know, in second grade and then I went back to the poems from when I was entering middle school and all of these things, and I was like, whoa, you were just sitting there witnessing the world prioritizing yourself, healing from it in the moment, and so I just, instead of telling anybody how to do it, I wanted to show what my mind was as a 13-year-old girl in Harlem who was navigating all kinds of violence, police brutality, gang violence, violence at home, sexual abuse, being moved through the foster care system. They were all happening at once, you know, and it was all things that people would describe separately and that I got to sit and look at and say this is one person, it's me, and I'm occupying all of these spaces, and so, if it's true for me, it's true for a million others, you know what I'm saying, and I just wanted Concrete Kids to be a place as intense as it is and as weighted as the content can often be, I wanted it to just be deadass. Young people need people to be deadass with them. They

need to say, you know what, nobody's gonna tell me to feel safe or to trust the adults in my life when I see the headlines and I see that even if I do have a perfect life and make a perfect career and have a perfect family I may just get murdered anyway. You can't tell a young person today here's how you do this because we're dying anyway, you know, so it's about sharing our stories and letting everybody know that in honesty and in breeding love and being honest with ourselves and each other and letting that be the place where we let the work ring loudest. We are able to make change, you know, and a lot of people are like how is this activism? I was like do you know what it means to sit down as a young girl who's going to school and see myself reflected in the very books that I'm being taught with? That is not what happens. I didn't see myself nowhere. All the people who were going through what I was going through were adults, and the adults were talking to me like I was a child when I already had been in court, I knew way more about the active legislation in this country than anybody else around me, even the history teachers teaching it because they'd never been there before, you know, and so I just wanted to put a place, and it was an insane endeavor because I figured to do something like this is inescapable, and I didn't want to use it at all to tell these stories. I wanted to create, you know, here are the colors of the painting. Go create the room. So, yeah, so that's Concrete Kids, or why she came to be, I suppose.

Huda Hassan:

Thank you. I mean, both of you guys, like I said, are tapping into very significant themes, social, political, economic, systemic adversities or realities of life in North America or this continent that we live in but also environmental, something that is long-term, something that clearly impacts all of our futures, and you've done it both so wonderfully and talentedly. For Hannah, I wanted to understand more about your relationship with the plastics crisis, and I would love if you could explain for me and the audience Hannah4Change, because, from my understanding, that's where a lot of this started from, right? A Facebook group that was dedicated, well, it turned a Facebook group into a fully developed organization dedicated to educating the public about the urgency of the growing plastics crisis, so I wanted you to explain what Hannah5Change is, how it came to be, and what exactly your mission is toward the plastics crisis.

Hannah Testa:

Definitely, and I do touch about it a little bit in the book, but definitely not the fully story. I touched about it a little bit earlier, but I actually did a lot of activism work from a younger age and it was actually geared a lot more toward animals and protecting endangered animal species. I was around 10 years old and I was just learning how animals that have roamed the earth for millions of years could go extinct during my lifetime, and as a 10 year old that was mind blowing to me and I knew that I couldn't just sit back and watch it all happen, that I had to do something, even if I was just 10 years old, just in fourth grade, so I went online and found organizations that were taking action and actually doing something, and I pitched in to help wherever I could, so if they were collecting items or doing fundraisers or collecting petitions I would help out wherever I could, and that's how

Hannah5Change ended up being made as a Facebook page so that people in my community could learn about if I was collecting items, raising money, doing these things. It was an easier way to spread that message out to all the people in my community and my family and friends, so that's how Hannah5Change really came to be, and I eventually started shifting into environmentalism as I actually learned about its impact on animals, and that's what really opened my eyes to plastic pollution, and I actually watched a documentary called Plastic Paradise, and that's what really shifted my perspective on it because I knew a little bit about it here and there, but that's what really opened my eyes to the whole issue, and I felt an immense amount of guilt. I felt I was like oh my gosh, I have used so much plastic in my life, and I realized that, you know, I haven't thought about it at all, and living in Georgia I don't see the beach. I live hundreds of miles inland, and I still felt an immense amount of guilt as I realized that I still have an impact on our ocean even though I don't see it every day because of our connection with waterways, rivers, and streams that all ultimately lead to the ocean, but it also has a huge impact on human health, on animals and the environment, as well as our climate and also impacts people all over the world, not just as pollution but also we ship it overseas to so many different countries for them to deal with. I was about 11 years old, and I felt so guilty, and I realized that a lot of people don't want to be a part of the problem. They just weren't aware that this was a problem or don't really know how to be a part of the solution. That's when my mission really shifted to really help educate people on these global issues. A lot of times, especially with plastic, they maybe knew a little bit about it like save the turtles, don't use plastic straws, it's pretty much what most people know about, but there's a lot more to it. It's not just saving the sea turtles. It's also, you know, our planet as a whole and saving our future and even for our own human health, as well, and I've been wanting to educate people ever since on these issues and how people can really turn this knowledge into power and really take action on these issues.

Huda Hassan:

You detail a lot of the history of the production of plastics, and I was learning a lot from reading this text, learning that it was first created in 1907 and heavily used during the second world war and since then has grown, like the usage of plastics has grown astronomically to the point where now 300 million tons of plastic is produced globally and only used once before being disposed of, and you also give a lot of great recommendations about how people can individually reduce the harm of plastic waste, so I guess my question for you is what did the research process look like for you, and writing something that is, writing a piece that is such a complicated but extremely relevant topic but writing in such an accessible way that someone as young as 12 or 13 can read, or any age as well as an adult, and really find interest and learn as much as possible from? So, yeah, I guess my question is what was the research process?

Hannah Testa:

It was very interesting, and even though I've been kind of in the plastic pollution space for several years, probably like 7 or 8 years, I still was learning a lot researching, getting to talk with people, and I of course

wanted to make sure all the information I provided was correct so I was going through and making sure I have all the correct sources, making sure, you know, what I have is true, but I also wanted to make it really impactful and also something people can kind of wrap their minds around because a lot of times, you know, if you throw statistics out it's such a big number you can't even kind of think about how big that is. You say, like, 8 million tons of plastic go in our oceans each year. That's a large amount, but it's so hard for us to like really realize how big of a number that is and being able to say, you know, that's a truckload every minute, being able to kind of make it easier, especially for younger kids, too. They don't have a grasp on that, but saying a truckload every minute that's something they can definitely understand more of, so being able to provide correct information but also kind of make it tangible for people. It was a very interesting, tedious process, but it was a lot of fun, and I also got to talk with so many people to be able to put this book together and also I talked about how I talk with other young people at the end of the book. That was one of my favorite parts, getting to hear other incredible kids and their stories. A lot of them are my friends and being able to share their message, as well, but I really, you know, bringing the whole community together in this book, even though I'm on the cover and talked about my story, you know, a lot of people came together to be able to share this story.

Huda Hassan:

Amyra, so you are the author of three books, *Concrete Kids*, *Freedom We Sing*, which is a children's book, and *Darling*, which is to be coming out in 2022. Clearly, you're an accomplished writer and you are also a playwright, you are also a poet, you are also an educator, you are also an activist. While I was reading through your story, I was really drawn to one specific line that I want to inquire more about. I believe it was on page 17 when you were talking about the foster care process and going through the legal system and the ending of that piece says they told me to draw, I chose to write. So, I wanted to ask what compelled you to gravitate specifically toward writing, specifically poetry over prose, and are there any specific writers who have inspired your relationship to the craft?

Amyra León:

Well, honestly, when I was younger, the thing I noticed the most, literally, my earliest memories of adults are them diminishing my intellect, you know, and I was exposed to excruciating amounts of violence, and when that's happening it makes you incredibly aware of yourself, your environment, when you feel safe, when you don't, and it makes, it creates an opportunity in anybody, no matter what age you are, to start making choices, you know, and so from a very young age I had to make choices about my safety whether I had the language to describe them or not, and so, you know, there's one thing that all these Law and Order episodes and these detective shows and these corny, you know, looking at adoption and looking at young, troubled kids in juve and the group homes, like, they always show them get a piece of paper that's a blank page and some crayons, okay, and I'm not gonna lie, the amount of times that I was given a box of Crayolas and a little notepad was way too many, but I think it was

because, for me, I had the access to describing what it was that I saw, you know, and from age 3, you know, I was already calling the police. There's police reports that say child called police, like, it's me. I was 3, you know, and so telling me to draw out my feelings felt like they themselves were not prepared for the answer, and so I always, you know, I found that I constantly got myself in trouble by telling the truth, you know, and they were trying to breed in me a liar, and because I wrote everything down there was no way that anybody could tell me what was and was not the truth, and just because I was a child a lot of adults were trying to dictate to me what the truth was, you know, and I love, I always tell Hannah, and I haven't said anything specific yet, but the reason why I love that you're in this position, you know, at such a young age, and I'm not calling you young because of young, I'm calling you young because amen, okay, to still be in high school and have these opportunities is what happens when somebody recognizes that their choices and their voice is of value with support around them, you know, and even if it's one person who believes in what you believe in, anything is possible, and so me, Concrete Kids is essentially the version of me that Hannah is right now, you know what I'm saying, the version of me that, you know, a completely different history, completely different life, completely different passions, but a young person who said my voice is of value and the truth that I see I'm gonna make sure you recognize, you know, and so I just knew that everyone around me was afraid of what I was going to say so I knew that it must be worth me writing down. I also knew that my voice was of incredible importance in court. I was making life decisions for the next, for the rest of my life based on conversations I had with a social worker, conversations I had with a judge, you know, and I was like, woah, like, and I had like 10 social workers, too, constantly changing, so I was the only purveyor of truth in the situation, you know, and because I wrote everything down there was nothing to hide from and no one that could hide from it, either, and so, yeah, that's why I've been writing consistently but I would say that I turned it into an artform and less of a therapeutic form of expression when I found out who Frida Kahlo was, and I love Frida Kahlo, and she has a way of looking at the atrocity, dissecting the war and the terror, staring at the wound long enough for you to understand it, and then to see the beauty in it, you know, and I was introduced when I was around 12, and then I started immediately doing spoken word and performing, you know, at poetry club and then doing all these things as a kid because I was like, woah, this woman is one of the most famous painters in Mexico, she is a fashion icon, but also she painted her miscarriages, she painted the wars that she had, the wars that her country was going through at the same time as painting the wars that she was going through, and they were both of equal importance and of equal, equal stakes, you know, so it's an indirect, but she was the first artist that I can remember, you know, 20 years ago that said you will, you are allowed to share this story, and it is allowed to be as frightening as it is, and it is allowed to be as, as, as glorious as it also was, you know, and I think I write that in Concrete Kids,

as well, and like there's no way to look at Harlem, to look at black people, to look at marginalized communities that don't even believe in that language. To be marginalized says that I agree to identify as something that says that I agree with the landscape in which you're operating and I don't, and I think that as a young person I was raised and educated by teachers who were telling me one day you'll get out of here, and they were coming from elsewhere, coming to Harlem, teaching little black kids, feeling really good about themselves, telling them that one day I would be able to escape this place, as if it was place I had to escape, you know, and, yeah, I'm just glad that I wrote everything down because I wrote down the joy, you know. I remember the joy, and as I'm older I get to look back and I say, you know, the things that I talk about are the wars, but the things that I keep are the joy, you know, so, yeah, but that's why I didn't draw no pictures. Now I paint all the time and I get it, but I think adults need to understand that they need to humble themselves and start being prepared to ask questions and even more so prepared to receive the answers from young people.

Huda Hassan: Can you say that part again, the wars you've chosen to, the wars you remember but the joy you choose to keep?

Amyra León: Yeah.

Huda Hassan: I love that. That's beautiful. That's very beautiful.

Amyra León: Thank you. I didn't even know I said that. I was like, yeah, girl, I said that, I guess. I'm always talking some shit, and, also, if I'm talking too long, you all can just go like this because I get lost in a stream like water, baby, like water.

Huda Hassan: We'll keep doing the back and forth between you and Hannah, but one more question for now at least. You recently released your new album, Witness. Congratulations, by the way, and your musical debut is Something Melancholy, which I was listening to the past few days, which is absolutely gorgeous. Yeah, there are some songs that I am just in love with, particularly Chasing. That work came out in 2016, and it led to sharing stages with people like Common and Nikki Giovanni. I was blown away when I saw Nikki Giovanni as a black feminist writer, absolutely a fan, but you being a writer yourself I thought that was so incredible for you to share that space with her. Can you, so, a 2-part question, sorry. Can you tell us about your musical work and how it connects to the themes in Concrete Kids, and because I want to be a little selfish, can you tell me what Nikki Giovanni was like in person?

Amyra León: Okay, well, honestly, Witness is an album that I started working on in 2017, and the first song that was made that said, oh, are we making a new project because it was like 6 months after my first project came out, Something Melancholy, but it was like 6 months after that, I had toured, I did a whole little pocket in Europe and stuff, and just, you know, built things from Twitter, which I like to say like I've built, I have no manager, I don't have a team, I don't have a social media, I don't have anybody on, I don't have a literary agent, I don't have, I don't have nobody. I'm doing everything by myself, you know, and I've toured the world, I've gotten, you

know, I have 5 book deals, I have all kinds of things, I'm talking to labels, I'm collaborating with anyone, and I'm not saying that like oh my god, I'm saying it because people need to understand that there's a way that things are and there's a way that we can demand that they be, you know, and my music has been a place where I walked in and I said I don't know what y'all talking about with an industry, but I've been doing poems for years and I know how to perform so I'm just going to come in here and do what I want to do, you know, and so my music is very much based in improvisation, as is all my work. I've mentioned this before, well, I guess not today, so every conversation is new, talking about writing so much is very exciting, I must admit, because I'm so used to just talking about music because once I started singing it kind of became my world. I realized that people listen differently when you sing. I can walk in to any room and if I sing for 30 seconds everything goes silent and then I speak, you know, and so that's how I do anything. If I have to give a keynote speech, I'm in a room of academics, I'm in a room of legislators, I walk in and I sing for 30 seconds and they are just like this is not, I don't compute, and then I discuss what happened because the vibration shifts, you know, and so music was something that, you know, poetry when it went from the page to being on stage for me was huge. I was like oh, people receive words. Oh, when I breathe there are particles that release into this air that are tangible. I can touch people when I speak. Oh, you know, and so music just became this place where my, the themes of my work, which I dance through constantly in every realm no matter what it is, can be received differently, can be received in a way that's like oh, I may just dance, oh, I may just let myself cry, oh, I may just call the person that I forgot and I loved, you know, and so I just wanted to create something a little bit more lasting. Books for me as a writer have always been something I lived with, but music is something I can't escape, you know, and there's music in everything and so when I found music I just ran, and Witness is every single song on the record was written in the moment that it was recorded, so it's all improved. I record everything I do because I just obviously say too much at the same time, and when I'm singing in the studio every note to me is precious. I'm like what is that because I'm still, I've only been singing for 5 years, you know, and I just like found it one day and was like where has that been, what are we doing, why is she not the forefront of my existence, so yeah, so Witness is just like this, this journey that I went on for 3 years as I was touring, and I moved to London in the process of making this record, I moved back to New York in the process of making this record, I wrote a play, and I wrote all 3 of them books in the process of making this record, so if you read anything that I have released, any written text and anything and then go and sit with this album, you'll hear the mirrors everywhere, you know. They reflect each other like crazy. There's literal poems in Concrete Kids that exist because of songs that I wrote, and I was like oh, I need to be the one who says oh, yeah, homie, so after you read that on page 62 I'm gonna need you to go listen to track 4 on Witness. That's deep, you know. Haha! But, yeah, so

Glow is a song that's on the album and it's about this huge moment in the book and the piece is called Blink and it's when I witnessed, when I was 13 years old I witnessed a young boy get shot and murdered about 20 feet from me, and I was the only person who stayed, and I was locked out of my building, and there was nothing I could do, it was inescapable, and I was like they're gonna come for me next, you know, and it's a definitive moment in my life because it was a point of trauma that defined me that had nothing to do with me. It was something I witnessed, you know, and the first song on Witness that I wrote was Glow, and it navigates that situation. It says even if I let it go, they're never let me glow. I saw my brother out there bleeding on the floor. I saw my brother dying. So where do we go from here? Where do we go from here, you know, and Concrete Kids just talks about that. Where do we go from here? Where I meant to go? I gotta build it. I gotta create it. I gotta imagine it first, you know. So, yeah, so Witness was created from that, and Nikki Giovanni is an entire universe. I love, I've seen her many times. The first time I met her was at an event where I was performing and so was she and she goes well, if that's the future, if that's the future, I'm okay. If the future's with that young woman, I'm okay with it, and I'm like oh my god, and she just is always just so deadass about how black women need to support each other and start, she prays that black women learn how to love themselves sooner, and that's been a message that I've seen throughout the years that I've seen Nikki Giovanni speak. Always, I hope that black women love themselves and learn how to teach one another to love each other better, so that's Nikki, doing the work that she does in real life on the page as always.

Huda Hassan:

I am definitely going to cosign Nikki Giovanni's sentiments to the both of you guys. If you are both the future, I am confident. Hannah, this question's specific to you, but Amyra can chime in on this later if you'd like. 2020 has been a whirlwind of a year for all of us. We're in the midst of a global pandemic, there is continuous protesting in response to police brutality here in North American but now we're seeing this across the globe, we're also seeing injustices and settler colonialism here in North American, and all of this with an impeding kind of crisis in the background, right, not to be a Debbie downer but just some of the realities of the world. From a very, very young age, I was watching your global nomads group interview the other night and just, we were talking about this earlier, I was really amazed by how young you started to understand a particular issue that you were concerned about that you saw within your reach and you found ways that you could specifically individually tackle those issues and you continue to do so and now are amplifying others to do the same. So, I guess my question for you is what advice would you give to any young person watching this right now who is trying to find ways to tackle the systemic political and social issues in their areas but of course the climate crisis, as well, too, so what advice would you give to the young emerging activist?

Hannah Testa:

That's a great question, and I kind of have a lot of different steps, a lot of

different advice to provide, so please let me know if I'm talking too much, but definitely I'd say the first really way to get involved is find you why. For me it was I want to live on a planet that doesn't need protecting anymore. That's my why. It's definitely shifted along the way through my journey and it will continue to shift and have different sections within it that break down even more, but that's kind of my why I want to keep doing what I do and what keeps moving me forward even in the face of challenges and obstacles and hardships I face, and I always talk about, you know, educate yourself on the issue, definitely from like trusted and reputable sources, but once you are armed with knowledge you can then use that knowledge to help educate others. With that knowledge, you can then advocate for change and that can be in so many different forms. For me, I did a lot of public speaking. That's definitely not for everyone. Even if, you know, you aren't really comfortable being up on stage and grabbing the mic, there are so many other ways you can get involved even behind the scenes or if you want to fundraise, lead protests, write letters, share on social media. Every little bit does count, and it's going to take all of us. I've definitely learned along the way that your age is really just a number. We've been taught as young people that our voices are invalid from a very young age, but no matter how young you are, you know, you can use your voice. I say voice, but it doesn't have to be necessarily speaking up but just advocating for change, being able to speak up at any age, and I think a lot of times, even just for adults listening, if you see a young person with an idea, you want to support them and help foster their ambition and fuel their passion. Amyra said earlier, like, I wouldn't be where I am today without the support of my parents and adult mentors in my life and really helping me, keeping me going along the way. I've faced so many different challenges along the way, but my parents and keeping going back to my why has really kept me along the way. I definitely say find your why, whether it's something, an issue you learn about or experience, you'll hear your calling and you'll take action and I haven't looked back since, and I think that's the same with everyone, but now more than ever the world needs you and your voice, but we also, we need everyone. Xiuhtezcatl, one of the other authors, he's one of my friends and I've met him several times, but he said something that really stuck with me and that's the weight of the world is not as heavy if we all lift it together. It's gonna take all of us. It's not going to be one person that's going to save the world from all these issues. It's gonna take all of us collectively coming together.

Huda Hassan: I love that. The weight of this world is less heavy when there's more of us carrying the load. That's beautiful. This might be a loaded question, but this is just to also for my own education and understanding, as well, too, of what the future looks like in terms of addressing the plastics crisis. What sort of changes do you want to see in the next 5 years?

Hannah Testa: There's a lot that can definitely be done, especially just with environmental issues and the climate crisis. There's a lot of inaction, unfortunately, and I think that's why. Now more than ever so many young people are stepping

up and really advocating for change because it's our future at stake and we're tired of seeing nothing being done about it. I was really lucky to be a part earlier this year to help introduce the National Break Free from Plastic Pollution Act earlier this year but this was right before COVID so since then it's kind of been put on the back burner, but that would be incredible legislation to pass, and I've been advocating for it ever since. It's the first national bill regarding plastics, but what it would do is it would ban certain types of single use plastics but also put more responsibility on the producers of it. A lot of times we're taught that we're the problem as consumers, but we need to give them the responsibility, you know. They need to control the waste management of it, the production of it, so that's something they will do. They will make them more responsible for the collection of it after consumer use but also incorporate more sustainable practices, so using less oil, because plastic is made of oil, so incorporating more recycled plastic instead of pumping out oil to make a plastic straw or a plastic stirrer that we use for 5 seconds and throw away, so it's an incredible piece of legislation. I advocate for it all the time, but it's very groundbreaking, but I think it also can scare people sometimes just because, but, you know, it's definitely needed, I think, and the plastic crisis, even just with the pandemic it's gotten so much worse. We see a lot with the pandemic that a lot of other environmental issues that it was being very beneficial, especially like with air quality, but the plastic problem is astronomically worse because we're using so much more single use plastic and gloves and masks and hand sanitizer. Definitely stay safe, I'm not anti-mask, but you definitely, you know, want to find reasonable alternatives, but now with, you know, takeout and delivery and online shopping, we're swamped with single use plastics, and it's hard to get away from, but we definitely need to have a lot more education on the issue and also a lot more action on the issue, all environmental issues, so that we can, you know, help protect our planet for my generation and generations to come.

Huda Hassan: I guess this might be directed to both of you, but how do you feel, what's the usage or do you find, do you think that there's an important link that we need to connect between social media and making changes in the world, like do you, do you see that as a necessary tool that can allow us to speak against power dynamics and be active as young people or grown people?

Amyra León: I think like anything it needs to be handled in moderation. I think there's, we're running the risk right now with mental health with people who are burnt, like, they're, it's not a burden to be knowledgeable and aware, but it is when the consumption of the knowledge is not happening in a way in which you aim to learn rather where you aim to feel, to be mobile, to do something. When you're only learning to do something, you kind of never sit down, rest, and digest what you've taken in or wait long enough to see the viable source that will come just hours later, you know, so you have people funneling information, funneling information, funneling information, digesting information, people taking on leadership roles and the leaders

having a lot more difficulty reaching people, you know, and I think that there needs to be a level of accountability within that because I do think it's incredibly, it's like, it's how everything is happening right now, you know. It's the way people are discovering, you know, world humanitarian crises that were never heard of in a country that they don't know how to spell in a place so far away that they've never even seen it on a map, like, this is how we're getting there but this is also we're being coming aware of the things that are very really affecting the everyday people around us, so I think, though, in moderation. We have to understand that there's, there is a firm value in time when it comes to education and we cannot assume that because we've read a headline, because we've read one book entirely, because we've read one article or a series a week, there was a month, there was a season last year where I did a lot of reading and a lot of digesting of information, that is not it. Education is something that continues, and I think social media has created a flash moment where people are assuming that because they remember it today for the next 10 hours, it's like the SAT effect, like did I learn because I learned or did I learn for the state test, you know, so it's like we, I just want to create, I think, it's incredible. I think the level of accountability, though, and the validity of resources and the way that even the way we're talking about corporations just need to be more responsible, you know. We're looking at Twitter, waiting for them to, like Twitter's being like, oh, I'm so sorry, red flag on President Trump's conversation, oh my gosh. Cut it out. Stop the bullshit, you know what I'm saying, like we have to hold more accountability to these incredible resources, you know. It's the same thing. Everything, everything, everything that's good has to come in moderation, as well, before it becomes a violent place. I also think that everybody needs to understand and just in response and in alignment with what Hannah was just talking about, like, it is very confronting to recognize our own impact when we're doing things that are just a part of our everyday, when me ordering food and throwing out my, you know, my containers and not paying attention to how many things I'm using is just like brushing my teeth. It's the same way that we forget that there are children starving next door and then there are kids that have absolutely no access to viable healthcare, you know, and so it's like if we can just, if all of this forgetting is the same as the consumption, then we're not gonna really be able to make change, and I think that people need to get it together and prepare themselves to be uncomfortable because revolution is not convenient. It is never meant to be convenient, and if it is convenient it is certainly oppressing someone. You understand? Because the same way you said the equally yoked, if we are carrying this world together, that means we are all taking action to make sure that that weight is evenly distributed. If it is easy and everybody relies on everything being easy and under 200 characters and immediately accessible, you know, if it's easy, it's likely that your work has not been done yet, you know, so hold that accountability and really challenge yourself to do more than digest what is before you, to do, to take the

research off the screen, to go digest the world and experience a real conversation, to have conversations with yourself that you aim to have with anybody else. I pray you have them with yourself first because you must understand where you're coming from before you try to make anybody understand who you are and why they should care about you and what your beliefs are and that's why I tell my story in everything. If you know exactly what I've seen, you may have an idea of what I've experienced, and if you know what I've experienced, you may have an understanding of my knowledge, and if you can trust my knowledge based on seeing my experience, then we may just be able to walk together transparent, you know what I mean? So, transparency, accountability, community beyond the screen, letting the community in the screen be impactful, and it's okay, it's not gonna be easy, but it never was meant to be, and if we build a community around these difficult situations and we build love, we breed love in these difficult situations, we're building safety in an incredibly dangerous world, you know? I got heated. I'm done now.

Huda Hassan:  
Hannah Testa:

That was a beautiful answer. Hannah, did you want to respond?  
That was beautiful. Yeah, I definitely want to touch on kind of what you were talking about. I think especially we hear a lot of the cons of social media and more of the like influencer style of, you know, not comparing yourself to other people but even just as activists, you know, our algorithm is set as you want to boost other people and other information so a lot of times our algorithm can be so overwhelming and so depressing that you just put your phone down and just kind of take a second and really be able to, you know, touch the ground and, you know, kind of digest it all and take a step back and breathe. I think a lot of times even, or a lot of people don't realize that because my algorithm is not the same as yours, you know, the people next to me, but it can be very overwhelming for sure, so definitely, you know, spending time offline, doing your own research. You know, you can't obviously trust everything you see online, but I think it's also a great resource to share information, be able to share your projects with a whole other group of people that you'll never be able to reach without it, and I've also been able to meet some other incredible people, definitely starting off kind of as GenZ, you know, we're kind of growing up in this era of social media and technology. Where I am in Georgia there weren't a whole lot of youth activists, especially on plastic pollution, and I felt very isolated, very alone, and it was kind of hard starting off and being able to meet other people just like me, even if they're on the other side of the country, on the other side of the world, it really helped keep me going to find my people that really understand me more than some of my friends here, so that was really, you know, uplifting to me. Every kid is just like me, realizing the same things and being able to uplift each other or share each other's projects, so there's definitely pros and cons to social media, definitely in moderation, but definitely if you can use it to uplift your work and other people's and share reliable information then it's a great resource and tool.

Huda Hassan:

Keyword is reliable information. There are definitely a lot of areas with

that on social media lately. Two more questions before we get to Q&A, and they're for both of you guys. I just want to know quickly for the audience and for myself, as well, can you tell us more about Penguin Teen Canada's Pocket Change Collective and how you both came to collaborate with them to make these pieces?

Amyra León:

It was, well, it wasn't specifically Canada, but they're family, Penguin, well, honestly, they reached out to me and, you know, they were saying that they believed in my work and that they appreciated the way that I was conveying my message and my ability to tell stories and they asked me if I wanted to be a part of the Pocket Change Collective, which aims to get, you know, today's leading young activists doing, you know, occupying all different realms of activism and social awareness and, yeah, share some work, and then I worked with iconic Rachel and Nathaniel, who are the editors who worked on the Pocket Change Collective, and just decided the best, I mean, I was on tour, so it was hectic, but it was an intense time and they were incredibly malleable and very earnest in building this, at least my book, you know, and everyone that I've spoken to, the other authors, are incredible, which is just an honor to be in such good company so the curation was really well balanced, as well, which just made me excited to be a part of it, you know, so, yeah, so that's how, they contacted me and I said absolutely, what are we doing, let's make something beautiful.

Hannah Testa:

Yeah, for me I do quite a bit of writing on blog posts and other websites and magazines just to talk about all different things but a lot of times it's plastic pollution and environmental issues, and I actually got an email one day last summer and it was from Nick from Penguin saying I loved your perspective on plastic pollution and we would love to have you write a book and it originally wasn't part of Pocket Change Collective. It was actually going to be kind of its own thing, and it was really just the beginning phases of it, and he reached out and said they're doing a Pocket Change Collective and he met with my team and it's a perfect fit and we'd love you to be a part of it, so then I kind of conjoined and became part of Pocket Change Collective. It was absolutely incredible. I love all the other authors and all the other books, but I think even for me I even have, even though I always preach like your voice is so important and age is just a number, I even had like a predetermined idea, like, oh, like, I'll write a book when I'm older. I felt like I was too young to write a book, even though that's the opposite of what I preach, and to be able to, you know, get this opportunity and get that email one day I think was incredible and even a self-teaching moment for myself that, you know, I am able to write a book at my age and, you know, I even struggle sometimes with predetermined ideas of what people put on me to this day and being able to, you know, learn and grow from that, as well, was incredible, but, like Amyra said, it's such an incredible series and I'm so excited to be a part of it with such good company, as well, and to be even on these panels with Amyra is so incredible. I love you so much. You're so incredible. You're like my sister.

Amyra León:

I have to come back to Georgia, baby, and I'm going to come see you.

We'll have a little party, a little celebration.

Huda Hassan: You guys are so beautiful. What can we expect from both of you guys in the future? Any upcoming projects? You know, there are more books, but anything else?

Hannah Testa: I have a TEDx talk coming up all about youth activism, so I actually film that I think next weekend and then it will come out later in November, so I've been prepping for that, which is really exciting, and I'm also actually working on a new project with my book coming out. I'm actually fundraising to be able to donate my books to schools, like in inner cities and especially schools that were definitively hit with coronavirus and the budget cuts. It's hard for a lot of these students and a lot of these schools in select communities, and I want to be able to provide these books for them, so that's been one of my main focuses right now along with, you know, finishing up my senior year of high school. I have my ACT this weekend, I have college apps, so I'm still being a teenager.

Amyra León: I'll never forget. I took the ACT and I brought like a chocolate bar and I said when you get stressed hour 2 you start eating this chocolate, girl. You gonna finish this test. It's so long. Anyway, shout outs to you being a full icon, though. She goes, yeah, I have the ACT and I'm gonna take the ACT in between TED talks and then I'm gonna go write book 3. Thank you. Go, Hannah! Sorry, continue. I just had to celebrate you.

Hannah Testa: No, that's pretty much everything I'm doing. Yeah, just hopefully being able to supply as many books as possible to those that need it.

Huda Hassan: So, for those who are watching right now, we are going into the Q & A, so if you want to shoot over some questions, please do. We don't have any so far, so I'm going to continue asking you guys questions, if that's okay.

Amyra León: Well, I can tell you what's coming next, too, as we wait. Send them questions, y'all. You know you got some. Send questions, send questions. If not, contact us individually because we're all incredible and I'm here to continue this conversation. Yeah, I am doing too much, as usual, but I am preparing to, I'm going to be making a documentary series called Carry Me, which focuses on the black women who have carried physically as mothers and carry, you know, on their backs the weight of revolution and social and political change in the United States in the last, I want to say, 75 years. So, I'm going to be interviewing different people about that and I want to focus on the humanity of them. The same way Concrete Kids kind of focuses, yes, it tells all the truths, but like, yeah, Sunday we were doing this and I was losing my shit and, yeah, Johnny died last week but then I had a good meal and it was crazy, you know what I'm saying, so just the humanity of a situation. I want to capture the humanity, you know. I've done events with Treva Martin's mother, Sabrina Fulton, and I've met Eric Garner's mother, Gwen Carr, and I do a lot of work and raise money for Sarah Collins, who is the fifth little girl who survived the Birmingham bombings in 1963 that killed four little girls, and everybody knows they killed children, what are they doing, and Martin Luther King did the eulogy, and James Baldwin was there and Nina Simone wrote, you know, songs about it, and every, and the, the civil

rights movement said they killed children, it's over, and it busted its ass out of there after they killed those kids, right, but nobody talks about the fact that there was a fifth little girl who was in the room who lost her eye and is still paying for medical surgeries today, reconstructive surgeries on her eyes and the government refuses to give her any financial reprieve from it, so I was like, if the government ain't gonna do it, we gonna do it, you know, and so I've been sending out, I've been sending Sarah, you know, raising money for her for years, and so now I'm gonna make a document, I want to make a documentary about those women and because they're more than the martyrs that they became and they're more than the public speakers that they were forced to be, you know, and these are people who are black women who still have families and lives to live who laugh on Sunday mornings and who have good sex, have good food, and live their life fully, you know, and if we, if we, if we continue to idealize our activists and our leaders and to put them in a position in which they are no longer human, we have removed ourselves from a level of honest communication with our humanity, and so I want to create a lot of these documentaries, and a lot of these are coming out and I still see that they're only focused on the very trauma that got these people in these positions at all, and I want to focus on the life that exists, the life that was, the life that is, and build celebration in this, so that's gonna be my next huge endeavor, and I'm like working on some fiction novels right now, too, which is like terrifying because I was like when I did Concrete Kids I said it's not gonna be no essay, it's not gonna be no prose, and suddenly I'm writing like chapters of fiction novels and I'm like what am I doing, what is she doing, and the same as Hannah I was like, I had a preconceived notion of what I was capable of and I'm just excited to see myself expand, so, yeah, so Carry Me, I have a few little fiction novels that are gonna be coming out in a few years, and I'm working on my next album, as well, and just painting and honestly trying to like, you know, I just had my other book, Freedom We Sing, came out, my album came out, Concrete Kids came out, I'm part of the new series of PBS American Masters and they made a documentary about my work and that just came out, and I was like, okay, release season is done, how do we tend, how do we tend, how do we tend to myself, who would I be if I wasn't telling this story, what other stories do I want to tell, what other people do I want to give care to, what young people can I, you know, inject some love and very direct focus into so that they, too, can continue breeding art, but, yeah, so that's what I'm doing. Oh, we have a question.

Huda Hassan: We do, yes. Did you see that? Can you see those?

Amyra León: No, I didn't. I just saw a little thing pop up.

Huda Hassan: Okay, so I'll read it out loud to you guys. Thank you for the first person who contributed their question. For anyone else listening, please feel free to send them through. So, the first question is how do you assess your influence and impact on your audience? Have you seen any social change in activism that you contribute to your voice and leadership? So, I'm assuming that's for both of you guys.

Hannah Testa: That's a good question, and I don't have an exact answer, unfortunately. A lot of times when you're speaking you don't really get to find out, you know, what resonates with people, you know, what they do with that information, which I would have loved to know, but, yeah, you really don't really get to understand, you know, who takes things away and what parts really stuck with people, but I think I can say for most activists our goal is to at least inspire one person. In a room of a thousand people, at least one person, if they take something away from that, I did my job, you know. That means the world to me. I've definitely heard a few stories along the way, especially like when I talk to students in schools I'll hear messages from teachers or parents later on saying my child came home or said this or is working on this project so every now and then I will hear some of those success stories of people that have done something after learning about me or listening to some of my speeches, but a lot of times we don't get to hear those, but it's definitely rejuvenating, for sure, when you do.

Amyra León: Honestly, I really, as a storyteller, I found myself really relying on music to make things happen for me, and it's a huge part of my activism because I don't take a minute, a second at the mic where I don't remind the people in the room that they are live, where I don't remind them to take knowledge of their breath, where I don't remind them that the things that I'm speaking of are from a human who is here and filled with celebration and joy, and then I speak to them afterwards, you know, and I, a lot of my work for years was ground work, you know, and when I was a little girl there was a lot of things going on in Harlem that we didn't have the, you know, social media wasn't the same as it was. We didn't all have cell phones, we had like walkie talkies, and there was no, you know, I just got a computer when I was like 16, so it was all about building community and being intentional and learning how to really impact one person and recognizing that in impacting them you're impacting their universe and it really created in me an opportunity to treat everyone like a universe, you know, because when I'm in the pantry line, if we got too many cucumbers and too many tomatoes this week then we gotta know exactly who we're giving the extras to so nothing rots, you know, and so that's the way I've carried into my activism is if I have this energy I'm gonna make sure that I'm on ground with this energy so people can digest this vibration and walk away differently, not because they're gonna do anything else, but because they've allowed themselves to settle where they were in the present, and so a lot of my work is presence work and assessing that, and, again, I was very physical. I toured. I was doing like 200 shows and appearances a year for five years until corona. Corona stopped the highest performance year of my career and thank god because I would have lost it being on that many flights, but I'm in the room with people, and I have the conversation on stage that I've already prepared and then I let myself give the listening ear or the conversation after I'm done and so my fan base is very communicative. They contact me constantly in emails, through Spotify, through, you know, writing engagements because, again, like, I just let my words do, they find the space that they need to be in, which is

another thing I just want to tell young people is it's not about finding a medium or a form of expression to become an expert in. It's about finding out what's true today and letting it be true, and so if today I'm a painter and that's the way you need to receive my message, that's the way you receive it. If tomorrow I'm a singer because I just couldn't write it down, then that's what you receive, you know, so, yeah, I just, I have lots and lots of conversations, I've raised lots and lots of money, I have been in the room for life changing events for different people that I never would have met otherwise, so that's a big thing, and also I think for anybody who is about to enter this space or anything, know that a conversation with even just your family member can change and radiate an entire lineage of people. Never confuse what a conversation can accomplish, and I think that that's what these books are doing. They're starting conversations because they're small and they're, you know, but also knowing that the power of you starting a conversation is enough.

Huda Hassan: True. So, there's a second question for both of you, and I'm going to add a third one afterwards because I'm selfish. To both of you, how do you find balance in your work and life, which I think actually you were just touching upon, Amyra, but I think this is something that I would love to hear from both you, as well, too. How do you find balance between your work and your life?

Hannah Testa: I'll go first. I joke around and I think a lot of people don't take me seriously, but I really am just a normal student, a normal teenager, like, I go to school every day, I was at school earlier today, I just go to my local public high school, I walk home after school, and I do my homework, and I hang out with my friends, like I do a lot of what I think a lot of normal kids would do anyway, I'm on TikTok and social media, I spend time with my family, I balance my social life, but I also, you know, spend a lot of time as an activist, so sometimes I prioritize my time with kind of understanding what I need in that moment. Sometimes I can, you know, grind out a whole day, some days I don't even want to touch my laptop. So just kind of listening to myself and saying what can I accomplish today, what do I need today, and sometimes it's just sitting by myself and relaxing, sometimes it's being with other people, and sometimes it's working, and it changes day to day, but I am in many ways just a normal teenager.

Amyra León: I, honestly, I was operating based on the flight schedules for years, so it was like, oh, if I'm on the plane for six hours to London, then I'm gonna do everything, all the writing I could possibly do, ain't no wifi out there, ain't no food worth eating, I'm gonna focus, you know, so that's where I got a lot of my writing done, a lot of my reading done, a lot of my reflection and my self work happened in transit because like the second I graduated from college I was on the road, and so that has been something that honestly during this quarantine I recognize like, wow, again, I was living no matter what the life was it was a good life, you know, but, you know, it was a beautiful, vast, crazy, ever evolving five years, so I don't understand how I've done so many shows, met so many people, and I've done so much with something that is still new to me. I can't read music, I don't know

what I'm doing, but I'm writing an opera with three of the biggest orchestras in the world, like, okay, I was like, I can't even, y'all gotta get me a translator for what I'm doing because I don't know what I'm doing but I'm glad to be here, you know, and so I think that I kept waking up in different situations, different cities, different hotel rooms, different opportunities, and I was saying yes to everything, and it was amazing, and I love it, and I don't think if, if coronavirus didn't cancel live music I really don't know when my life would have stopped. It probably would have been when I chose to have children or, you know, to do anything else, because my, like, as a, as a performing, as a live performer, the thing is to be in as many spaces as possible, giving your gift because, you know, there ain't nothing like live music, so, anyway, during coronavirus I just realized that I was living in between, you know, based on other people's schedules and I guess that also meant that I was living based on where the money was coming from, you know, and what I needed to be doing, and it dictated a lot of my existence, and I didn't mind it, but it wasn't possible for me to notice until, again, this moment where I suddenly have all this time to say, well, ain't no flight I'm getting on. I was in London. I was there because I wrote a play that was commissioned there and I wanted to know the people, but we're gonna see it, because I could be in New York and write a play that goes up in London, how fashionable, but my work, I'm deadass about my work. I have to know the people who will physically see it, you know. I might not know you specifically but now I know what it's like to live in south London and the theaters in south London so you're all gonna come, you know, and it's different, and so that was all circumstantial. I got a huge commission to write a play and I was so excited that I moved to a different country to go work on it, and so, anyway, I just think that's a big thing that a lot of people are recognizing is how much of their life is circumstantial and ever evolving outside of their control and how much of it is something that they're choosing. Now, with all this time, work is blurring lines more than ever before, as well, because I'm like, damn, I'm on my computer now, I'm gonna turn it off but my computer's still there, I'm gonna get up and still be in my house, and we did all this talking and all this work, you know, there's no separation, so I think building the separation has been incredibly important and by doing that, and I'm sorry, I always explain a lot of things and I'm like, woah, but the point is that building a sanctuary for the very first time in my life, you know, and for me I was in foster care and moving around all the time, 13 homes, I moved 13 times by the time I was 7, and then I was doing 200 shows a year, you know, so there was no transition. It was like I was moving, moving, moving, moving, moving, got into college, yay, moving, moving, moving, moving, moving, and right now this is the longest I've ever been in one place, and I said let me paint the walls, let me get some art. This next time I go somewhere beautiful, let me take home a statue, let me build an altar, you know, and the things that I want to see and the colors that I want to experience and the smells that I want to experience that will enlighten my spirit to rest are the things that I need to remind me

that my work, my work is simply a symptom of living. It is not my life. It is a beautiful calling, but it is not my whole life, and I love knowing that now because I used to, I took pride in it being my whole world, you know, and I think that that's also what I was celebrated for, and I think as creators and as activists it's very important. People will celebrate you burning out. They will celebrate your overstretching your capacity. They will celebrate you for being brave in situations where you actually endangered yourself, you know, and I think that it is incredibly important that we allow ourselves to remember that the real revolution is in letting ourselves live at all, you know. I want to see a better world for myself, but I have to live in this world to know that I care that much, you know, and so I just urge everybody to live, and your work doesn't define you. If you don't have love in your work space, in your work ethic, in your work community, in your boss, in any of your relationships, if there's not honesty there, I beg you to breed it there. That's where the revolution begins, too, is creating safety in everything that you occupy. This is our life, you know. If I died today I will have said hallelujah, I done lived a good life because I let myself live, you know, and if we continue to centralize work and centralize everything that is outside of ourselves, we won't really allow ourselves to experience this incredible earth, you know, so, yeah.

Huda Hassan: Capitalism has played a treacherous game and made us think that life is all about work.

Amyra León: Well, I think also knowing that capitalism is a word and we all are active in that in making it operate, capitalism is a headline and we are the rest, you know, and so if we allow ourselves to know that capitalism actually isn't the way, that the way I'm digesting information, me being on this computer at all is an act of capitalist inquiry, you know, and so I think, not like the, but, like, really, though, there's a level of personal accountability when we say, when we occupy that reality. It's like, yes, it is capitalism but also it is a choice, just the same with the plastics, right? It's all a choice. To ignore me is a choice. To be terrified of me is a choice, you know.

Huda Hassan: This is a question that I had for both of you guys, and I'm a big fan of astrology. I think a lot of us are now, and I always love to guess when I'm engaging with someone's musical work or critic work or written work, I always love to guess who they are and trace whatever parts of them that I can, but I was trying to guess both of your signs, and I figured I'd just ask you. I guessed fire sign, I will say, for Amyra, and for Hannah I guessed water or earth.

Amyra León: I'm Taurus.

Huda Hassan: Really?

Amyra León: I'm always alarmed by somebody who really gets it. They're like (scream).

Huda Hassan: I love Tauruses, though, they're on my sister's side, but I'm thrown off by that. Okay, actually, that makes sense, though, too. There has to be some fire in there, though. I feel like there's potential Sagittarius or something going on, as well. What about you, Hannah?

Hannah Testa: I'm a Libra.

Huda Hassan: I was totally off the boat with you guys. That's the Capricorn in me being

judgmental.

Amyra León: That's so funny. What are you? Oh, you're Capricorn. You just said that.

Huda Hassan: Well, I'm Scorpio, but I'm a Capricorn dominant Scorpio.

Amyra León: Oh, okay. I see.

Huda Hassan: So, kind of a water, fire, and earth. I think Scorpions, we're water signs, but we should be regarded as fire signs.

Amyra León: I'm pretty happy with my earth sign. This is my reprieve.

Huda Hassan: Yeah, okay. That kinda makes sense, too, though, actually. I'm going to like think about this and digest it. You think you know what the answer is and then you find out the answer, most of the time I'm right, today I'm clearly wrong.

Amyra León: No, we're just unique.

Huda Hassan: 100% unique and beautiful and wonderful.

Amyra León: Thank you so much, honey.

Huda Hassan: So, there's no more questions for today. I think this is a beautiful note to leave off on. I'm really grateful to have met you guys today and to have also read both of your works and to learn more about who you are. Hannah, you are doing a lot that's contributing to the future and the world that we live in and really emphasizing finding ways to compel us to individually find ways to take care of this planet better, and for that I am most grateful for you. Amyra, there's so much heart in your work that I really appreciated the ways that you've worked through the themes of grief, particularly myself as a black woman in the settler state there were ways I felt extremely seen through your work, and I'm always grateful for that, but the ways that you also tapped into self-care and self-love and emphasizing that violence, the violence in our lives will not and can not estrange us from this world if we choose not to. So, I'm grateful for both of you guys. Thank you guys for a beautiful conversation. I'm looking forward to seeing more work from you.

Hannah Testa: Thank you for having us.

Amyra León: Thank you, honey. You are a gem. Thank you, Penguin Teen. Thank you, Koffler Center. Thank you, participants. Yeah, I don't know if there's anything we should do, but touch base with us, y'all, you know?

Huda Hassan: Where can people buy the books?

Hannah Testa: Amazon's probably the easiest way.

Amyra León: You can also go to your local bookstore. There's many bookstores that have it, and also, Hannah, I've been calling some locals and telling them, y'all, you don't have my book, you should have my book, and also we should talk about your fundraiser. I'm gonna text you. Girl, we need to, okay. Hannah and I need to live outside of the Zoom calls we be on. I'm about to get my little sis on the call.

Huda Hassan: Thank you guys again for this. Thank you, Koffler.

Amyra León: Oh, Another Story is the official sponsor. You can go buy the book at Another Story.

Huda Hassan: Oh, if you are in Toronto, please support Another Story. That is the bookstore that you need to be supporting, absolutely.

Amyra León: Only in Toronto. Go ahead. Make sure Drake gets a copy. Someone get

this to Drake. Let Drake know what's going on in the 212. I got what was going on in the 6. I need to know what's going on in the 212.

Huda Hassan:

We will try to find Drake a copy of the book.

Amyra León:

Someone get Drake a copy of both of our books. Thank you. Okay, let me go before I get loopy, you know, I've been up since really early, you know, and Hannah has school tomorrow. Wow.

Huda Hassan:

Thank you guys again. Thank you to everyone watching. Enjoy your night.