

CH. 3

WATER

THE ELEMENTS OF MUTUAL AID

DOCUMENTARY
DISCUSSION GUIDE

◆ EXPERIMENTS TOWARD LIBERATION ◆ TOWARD THE ABOLITION OF THE STATE ◆



Colonization & capitalism are dams holding us back from each other. This chapter is all about tearing them down so we can let mutual aid flow between us. We discuss creating safer spaces, handling crisis without police, & navigating power dynamics, burnout, & conflict.



CH. 3

WUTSA

RUNTIME—65 mins

Before 2020, mutual aid lived in the margins of organizing spaces, rooted in radical traditions of community autonomy and antifascism. When the pandemic hit, the term exploded. But with that popularity, its political edge was blunted by a misconception that mutual aid boils down to just distributing goods.

That misunderstanding has led to burnout and apathy. But liberatory mutual aid transforms our relationships, sustains us as we fight the State, and prepares communities to defend their autonomy. It's time to sharpen mutual aid's edge together.

How do we move out of reacting to crisis and into responding with strategy and vision? How do we prepare ourselves and our communities to live freely beyond the State?

This series is a tool to help communities reflect on their efforts, build strategy together, and sow real relationships and infrastructure that will sustain us as the systems around us crumble.

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STEP 1 HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE



FACILITATION TIP: *Feel free to read the sections of this guide aloud together as a group!*

The Elements of Mutual Aid is a four-part series made to spark conversations. Today's episode is *Chapter 3, Water* and this discussion guide offers a few **QUESTIONS & ACTIVITIES** to help dig into some deep conversation afterward.

Ideally everyone has a copy of this guide so everybody can help move the conversation along together.

Use the **NOTES** section at the end to jot down thoughts, the **GLOSSARY** section for helpful terms, and the **RESOURCES** section to find other powerful media.

The entire series is freely available on YouTube and PeerTube with English and Spanish subtitles. For support with organizing more screenings and discussions, visit: theelementsofmutualaid.com/screen-the-series

STEP 2 ABOUT THIS CHAPTER



Before pressing play, let's check out a few of the main ideas in this chapter. *Water* is all about healing from the traumas of colonization and capitalism so we can come back into mutual relationships with each other.

LEARNING GOALS

- *To think critically about our position in colonization and what we're each tasked with healing*
- *Consider skills you have or need in your community to de-escalate crises without the police*
- *See ourselves as part of community instead of servers/saviors*
- *Reflect on what it means to bring our values into how we move through burnout, conflict, and projects ending*

Does everyone have what they need before starting the film?

STEP 3 AFTER WATCHING



3.1 THOUGHTS OR QUESTIONS?

Does anyone have any immediate reflections they want to share? Did anyone hear any terms they weren't familiar with? (*Check out the **GLOSSARY** if helpful*).

Optional: Take a quick 5-10 min break for people to use the bathroom before discussion.

3.2 SET AGREEMENTS

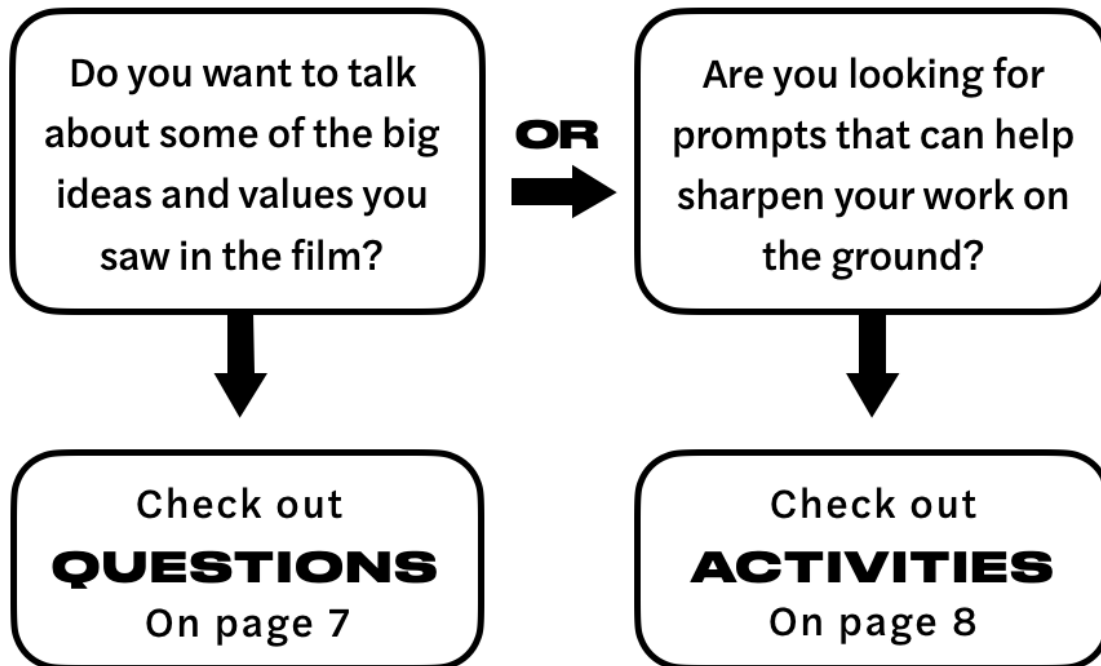
Before getting into discussion, it can be helpful to set a couple agreements to call back on. Here are some basics:

- *make space for quieter voices*
- *help keep the conversation focused*
- *be mindful of time*

Does anybody have others they want to add?

FACILITATION TIP: *If the conversation meanders, you can say something like: "That's a really great point but could we refocus on the question?" If a few people are talking a lot while others are quiet you can say: "Can we make some space to hear from voices we haven't heard from yet?"*

STEP 4 PICK A TOPIC & DISCUSS



Take a few minutes to look over the **QUESTIONS** or **ACTIVITIES** as a group and pick one to focus on. Throughout the discussion, refer back to this list if you need more inspiration.

FACILITATION TIP: *Do you have a larger crowd? Divide up into smaller breakout groups and set an amount of time for discussion. At the end of the time, have all the groups come back together and share their main takeaways.*

QUESTIONS



1. What does it look like to redistribute power dynamics and how do we avoid tokenization while doing it?
2. Have you ever seen a group change or come to an end in a way that was generative? Did they share lessons for others, did they keep relationships intact, was there transparency in their process?
3. What does it look like for our values (of liberation, abolition, de-colonization, etc) to be our guide while working through trauma, conflict, and harm?
4. In what ways have you been conditioned to rely on police for safety? What would it look like for your community to build the skills and experience needed to rely more on each other for safety?

ACTIVITIES



1. Take a few minutes to each write down some ways that cultures of urgency, burnout, disposability, patriarchy, etc are affecting your work. Share back with the group, write down a couple trends you're seeing, and then discuss how you might address them.
2. Spend a few minutes writing down what the titles of activist or organizer personally mean to you. Share your reflections as a group, then spend time discussing how these titles can lead to savior mentalities that separate us from our communities.
3. Take some time to list the different skill sets you have in the room for de-escalating crises. Then talk about what other skills you want to learn and come up with three steps your group/neighborhood/community can take to start learning them.

STEP 5 NEXT STEPS



It's hard to take time away from the work of caring for our communities to have these conversations. But they're so important to our ability to doing this work well and to moving intentionally toward liberation instead of just reacting to crises. We encourage communities to continue prioritizing conversations like this. Here's a couple ways to keep using this series as a tool in your community:

- *Apply key takeaways from this discussion into your organizing.*
- *Plan a screening of another chapter with this group.*
- *Plan a screening with the wider community and offer the lessons you learned here.*
- *Dive into some of the resources and form study groups to digest them.*

GLOSSARY



- **Ableism:** The prejudice against disabled people and the systematic exclusion of disabled people in society from healthcare to architecture to the lack of consideration for people's different access/health needs.
- **Accountability:** A commitment to being truthful and reliable in our relationships. When harm happens, we take responsibility for our actions and work toward repair.
- **Carceral:** Anything related to jails, prisons, and the process of incarcerating people. This institutional process can seep into our minds in the ways we "police" one another.
- **Community-Based Crisis Response:** Organic, locally-formed groups organized to de-escalate conflicts and support mental health crises to help make the community safer without having to rely on the police.
- **De-Escalation:** When we use communication skills to ease tension, find common ground, or create safe distance while conflict is happening instead of escalating the situation.
- **Hashké Societies:** People with a warrior spirit in Diné culture who have the role to instill discipline through action.
- **Indian Acts:** A series of American colonial laws from the 1800s through the 1970s that banned Native spiritual customs and practices and evicted tribes from their own land; such as the Indian Removal Act of 1830.

- **Medical Industrial Complex:** The web of corporate and legal healthcare policies that prioritize money over human life.
- **Mobile Crisis Teams:** State-based trauma response groups that generally partner with local first responder agencies like the police and often have invasive reporting requirements.
- **Naa Bik'iyáti':** A Diné practice of talking with one another and forming councils.
- **Naach'id:** A Diné meeting and ceremony used for strategic planning. Could be considered the original governance in Diné societies.
- **Peace-Making:** A Diné cultural practice of mediation to address harm and conflict. A relational approach that prioritizes kinship, collective responsibility, and restoring spiritual balance.
- **Peace-Making:** A Diné cultural practice of mediation that prioritizes kinship, collective responsibility, and restoring spiritual balance. These practices were suppressed and distorted by white supremacist, Christian settler colonialism.
- **Pod-Mapping:** Writing down relationships you can rely on in order to "map" a support network for times of crisis.
- **Transformative Justice:** A set of practices designed to navigate conflict and harm without having to rely on the police or court systems. It focuses on identifying and healing trauma instead of punishment.

RESOURCES



All About Love by bell hooks (Book)



Fumbling Towards Repair

by Mariame Kaba and Shira Hassan (Book)



Becoming Kin: An Indigenous Call to Unforgetting the Past & Reimagining Our Future by Patty Krawec (Book)



Creative Interventions Toolkit: A Practical Guide to Stop Interpersonal Violence by Creative Interventions (Workbook)



Lessons in Liberation: An Abolitionist Toolkit for Educators by The Education for Liberation Network & Critical Resistance Editorial Collective (Book)



The Feminist On Cellblock Y (YouTube)



Solidarity, Spirituality and Liberatory Promise On A Turtle's Back an Interview with Ashanti Alston recorded by Final Straw Radio (Audio Recording)



Watch the full series for free on
YouTube & PeerTube!

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