

WITNESSING: Practicing Presence

"I feel like it's almost an unbiased (medium), the tintype isn't saying, 'Oh this is an ugly thing and this is a beautiful thing.' It's just saying, 'This is all. This is everything. It is what it is.'" - Carla Rodriguez

conversation skills you will practice:

- observation
- attentiveness
- presence
- acceptance

1

Think about the things in your surroundings that change with time such as cut flowers in a vase, a garden plant growing in the spring, or a houseplant that is aging and dropping leaves. Select something that noticeably alters within a relatively short time frame to use in this activity.

2

Set a minute or two aside each day for a week (longer if you wish), to **witness/observe** your selected subject.

Consider documenting your subject each day, by either:

- Taking a photo, or
- Sketching/painting the item.

At the end of the week, take a moment to look at the daily images you captured.

Want to do more with this activity? If so, add the next few steps.

3

What do you notice about the images you captured? Write about each image in the series, documenting the changes you observed from day to day. Focus on what you physically observe such as size, color, shape, position, etc. What details change over time? Are some changes more subtle or dramatic than other days? The key is to note straight descriptions of what you **actually witness** without adding personal reflections or judgment. (e.g. Instead of noting a plant is aging or dying, document what you see that tells you that it is aging. Are the leaves browning? Are the stems drooping? etc.)

4

Ask yourself:

- How does it feel to witness what is without input or judgment?
- The unique medium of tintype photography captures subtle details in Carla's subjects. What insight, if any, did this activity offer you about the level of attentiveness required to notice subtle details?
- Imagine that you were going through something difficult. How might it feel to have somebody with you, being attentive to what you are experiencing? How might it feel to be truly seen, without someone putting energy into trying to change or fix the situation? How might you offer this gift to someone else?
- Reflecting on your life, when have you had to accept things as they are, as Carla says, "This is all. This is everything. It is what it is."?

CONVERSATION CONSIDERATIONS

In what ways might the practice of **witnessing** – the act of being present to what is without giving personal feedback – help you in a difficult conversation? In what ways might this activity help strengthen your ability to be present for somebody else? How might your **presence** by itself benefit the person you are with?

