

QYA April Zine



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Dear reader,

Welcome to the seventh issue of the Queer Youth Assemble monthly zine! Since Earth Day is on April 22, this issue we are focusing on all things nature, animals, and climate activism. We encourage you to love, celebrate, and fight for Earth all year round. Inside, you will find beautiful pieces of art, writing, and poetry created by Queer Youth Assemble members. We acknowledge the intersecting elements found within the content of this zine, and encourage you to read with both compassion and understanding.

Due to our strong belief in uncensored creativity, we decided to not put content limits on our creators for this publication. However, we understand that some of the content within this zine may be triggering to some readers. In this and future QYA zines, a list of specific triggers can be found at the top of each page, and any potentially triggering themes can be found at the beginning of each zine. Potentially triggering themes in this issue include brief mention of eating disorders. If you find yourself struggling after reading, we encourage you to reach out for support.

We hope you enjoy this publication, and are inspired to create whatever your heart desires.

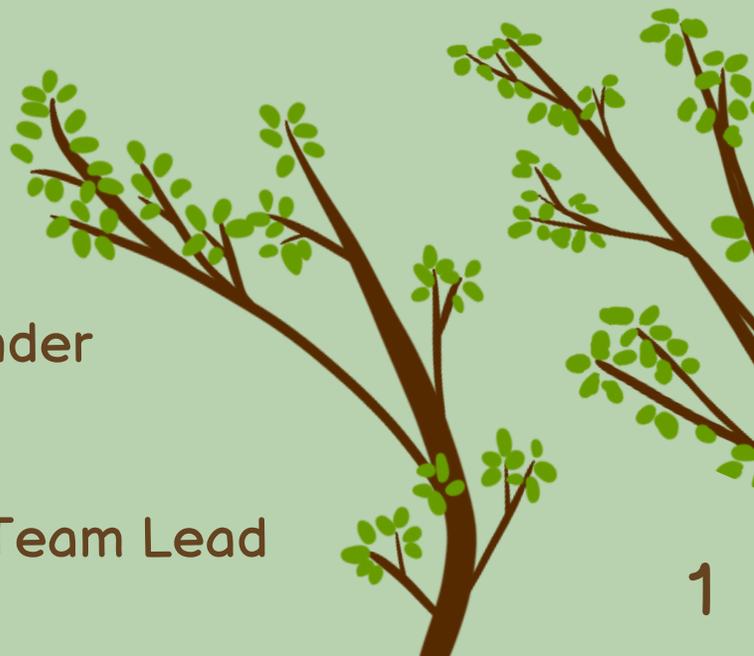
With love and care,

Esmée Silverman (she/her)

Queer Youth Assemble Co-Founder

Alice Mead (they/them)

Queer Youth Assemble Writing Team Lead



What is QYA?

Queer Youth Assemble is a non-profit youth-led organization dedicated to serving queer youth across the United States and its territories. We are committed to nurturing the joy, interests, and talents of queer youth, and giving queer youth the resources and support to create positive change within their communities. We envision a day where all queer youth are happy, supported, and able to reach their fullest potential.



Conversation About Conservation

by Cora Bod

As April approaches, we begin to look forward to Earth Day. It is an annual event to mark the beginning of the environmental movement as well as support various environmental projects. Highlights of this day are often talks about recycling, different conservation projects, and if you are a Disney fan, the yearly DisneyNature movie comes out. This year's theme, "Invest in Our Planet: What Will You Do?" provides an emphasis on action, innovation, and implementation of investments we can make in our communities to better protect the Earth. Part of understanding how to protect is knowing what to protect and why it needs to be cared for. There are creatures and life on Earth that have impacts on human life that we may never notice until they are gone or endangered. Something as small and elusive as bats provide valuable pest control and plant pollination. Fish in the ocean, such as bluefin tuna, provide quality meals and a critical purpose in the food chain. Even a plant as common as seaweed has the job of providing a home to sea creatures, as well as being a mineral rich food to humans. Small, common, and seemingly purposeless life on Earth is often what we need to protect the most.

In some areas of North America, when the sun goes down, the sky will become loud with gentle chirps and the sound of fast moving wings. Bats are an iconic symbol of the night and often connected to Halloween as well. However, their purpose in nature is much greater than a holiday symbol. These night time creatures are responsible for some of the most efficient pest control available. Recent studies show they are capable of consuming enough pests (various insects) to save the corn industry over one billion dollars per year in pest damages and pesticides. In addition, some bats search for plant and fruit nectar which helps pollinate areas in need. Bats are the only pollinator of the agave plant, which is often used as an alternative sweetener! These amazing creatures are in danger due to human intervention in caves and lack of education. Many people see them as pests meaning they get captured and taken out of their habitat. Human contact in caves has recently brought a life-threatening fungus which is responsible for over 5 million bat deaths since 2006. To stop this rapid decline, researchers are looking for treatments to administer to sick bats and there is a growing amount of projects to better understand various bat species.

While bats inhabit the sky, the ocean is also a key highlight of many conservation projects. The choppy waters and bustling reefs are home to large swaths of species, two of which are bluefin tuna and multiple subtypes of seaweed. Bluefin tuna are the largest

type of tuna and can grow to be as large as a horse! They are known for their speed and efficiency when hunting as they are a major ocean predator. On land, they are often seen as sushi. Unfortunately, due to overfishing, their numbers are dwindling. Not only are they a food source but they maintain balance in the ocean food chain. Without these large fish, their prey (mackerel, squid, herring, etc.) would most likely overpopulate and cause a new environmental issue. Recently, ethical fish farms and new fishing regulations are steps that have been taken towards conserving these irreplaceable animals.

From shorelines to the deep ocean, seaweed can be found almost everywhere. The word "seaweed" is actually a misnomer as the plant is not a weed nor is it just one thing. There are microscopic phytoplankton, kelp forests, and the regular sized plants people find washed up on the beach. Seaweed is not invasive nor does it choke out other life like a weed would. Instead, it grows abundantly to provide shelter and food for sea and land creatures. Seaweed is full of minerals and vitamins, which is why it has been eaten by humans for over 1,500 years. In fact, some strains of the plant have been found to have medicinal purposes. Kelp forests provide safe shelter for octopus, fish, seals, and other precious sea life. Phytoplankton is responsible for nearly half of photosynthesis on the planet, making it a critical player in oxygen production. As our oceans become polluted, it becomes harder for these plants and creatures to survive. Some fishermen in Maine have recently become supporters of kelp farming, a new venture to create food while preventing overfishing.

On this upcoming Earth Day (April 22, 2022), the goal should be to come together and care about all creatures, small and big. Earth is the animals in your yard, the dirt in your flower pots, and the fresh spring air that is approaching in these warmer months. It can be as simple as researching something you are curious about, which leads to understanding a new part of our beautiful ecosystem. In order to continue co-existing with bats, consuming bluefin tuna and farming seaweed, we must work towards building a sustainable and happy Earth. With a partnership between communities and the nature surrounding, this Earth Day and many more to follow will lead to a thriving world.

As a small closing note, the history of Earth Day is not so far back. Before 1970, there was no push for clean air, water, or anything of the sort. Senator Gaylord Nelson created Earth Day as a symbol to push for more activism and concern over the state of the Earth. The first Earth Day was held on April 22, 1970, which was only 52 years ago. Please visit The First Earth Day (history.com) for more information regarding this significant occasion.

Sources:

<https://www.earthday.org>

<https://www.fws.gov/story/bats-are-one-most-important-misunderstood-animals>

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/bluefin-tuna>

<https://oceanservice.noaa.gov/facts/seaweed.html>

<https://www.americanoceans.org/facts/are-atlantic-bluefin-tuna-endangered/>

Melting Away

by Alia Cusolito (they/them)



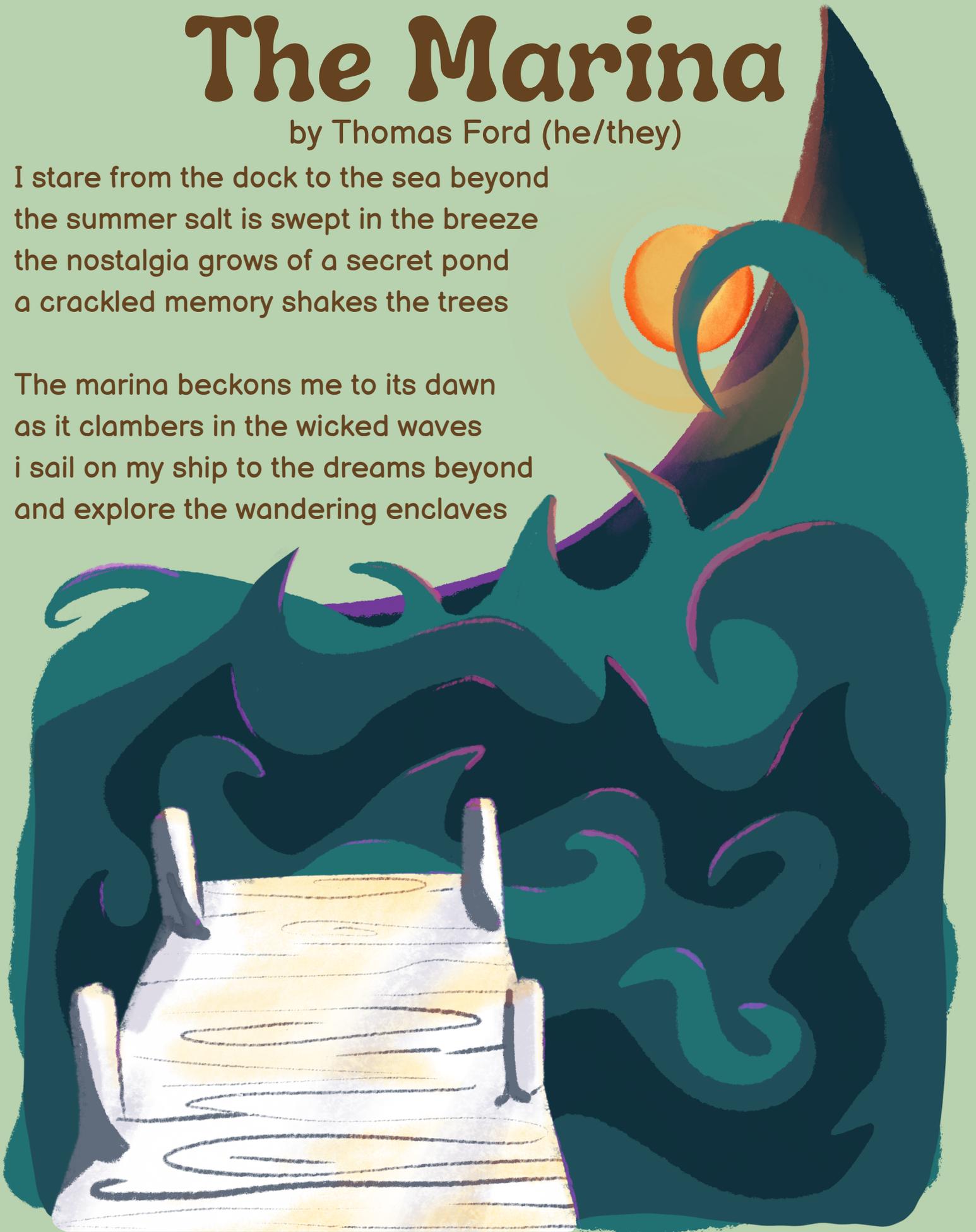
Image description: A square, acrylic painting of the Earth with the dark night sky and stars around it. On the top left, or northwestern, side of the visible globe, where North America would be, there is a huge fire which appears to be spreading across the world. On the right, or eastern, side of the globe, it appears that the Earth has been split open and inside there is a huge clock. It is melting out of the hole in the Earth, symbolizing human-made global warming causing the planet's time to 'melt away.'

The Marina

by Thomas Ford (he/they)

I stare from the dock to the sea beyond
the summer salt is swept in the breeze
the nostalgia grows of a secret pond
a crackled memory shakes the trees

The marina beckons me to its dawn
as it clambers in the wicked waves
i sail on my ship to the dreams beyond
and explore the wandering enclaves



Nature's Pride

by Jay Barry (they/she)

art by Kendal Lachance (she/her)

April has always held a special place in my heart for many reasons. One of those reasons is Earth Day! I've always loved animals, plants, and everything in the natural world. Animals especially are something I have always been really interested in, and I plan on working with them in the future! So I wanted to celebrate April by briefly talking about some different animals, but with a twist! Each animal here represents a different color, and the colors all combine to make a rainbow!

Strawberry Poison Dart Frog (Red):

- Small (less than an inch and an ounce!)
- Vary in color, frequently red with black spots
- Live in rainforests and groves
- Climb trees!
- Not endangered

Orangutan (Orange):

- Vibrant and distinctive orange fur
- Medium size, no bigger than 200 pounds
- Live in the forests of Indonesia
- Primarily eats fruits
- Critically endangered
- Main threats are hunting and deforestation

Banana Slug (Yellow):

- Resemble a banana in color and shape
- Typically yellow, green, or brown, resembling different stages of ripeness of bananas
- Large for slugs, averaging 9 inches
- Very slow; no faster than 6 inches a minute
- Live between California and Alaska
- Conservation status is unknown



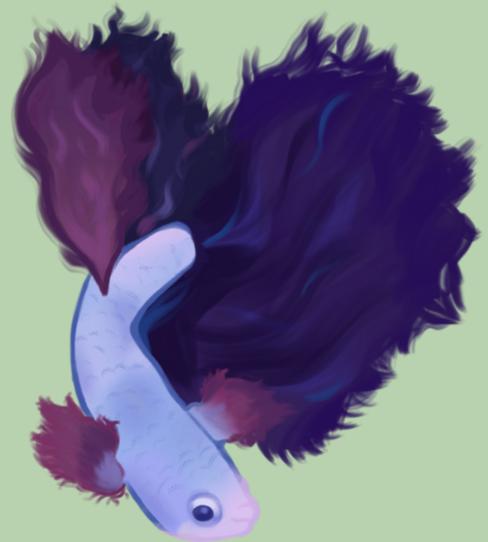
Chameleon (Green):

- Many chameleons have a green body
- Vary greatly in size from different subspecies (0.5 inches - 27 inches)
- Live in rainforests all across the planet
- Have prehensile tails
- Change color based on mood and weather
- Conservation status varies, but they are generally endangered



Betta Fish (Blue):

- Come in a variety of colors, but are often blue
 - Many kinds, from dragonscale to veiltail
 - Can be kept as pets!
 - Live in Asia
 - In the wild, their conservation status is unknown
 - Have impressive jumping abilities
- (Inspired by my own betta fish, who was a blue and red dragonscale named Griffin!)



Purple Emperor Butterfly (Purple):

- Deep purple wings
- Large for a butterfly
- About a 2-3 inch wingspan
- Live in England
- Conservation status is difficult to tell, but they are known to be rare



Sources:

<https://www.livescience.com/51061-chameleon.html>

<https://butterfly-conservation.org/butterflies/purple-emperor>

<https://www.worldwildlife.org/species/orangutan>

<https://www.nationalgeographic.com/animals/invertebrates/facts/banana-slug>

<https://www.henryvilaszoo.gov/animal/strawberry-poison-dart-frog/>

<https://www.fishlaboratory.com/fish/wild-betta/>

Rainwater Peaks

by Grey (they/them)



Image description: A mountain with a waterfall running down the middle, and two white eyes near the peak. Vines flow down the sides of the slope, taking on a hair-like form. Moss and boulders protrude from the sides of the mountain, and distant trees border the outline of the peak.

Veganism and Disability

by spoupysoupy (ae/aer)

TW: brief mention of eating disorders

In July of 2021 I went vegan, and it didn't work out.

My autism makes it hard to find foods that would keep me healthy under that diet and my class status doesn't give me access to the fancy stuff you see vegan influencers eating. I went vegan for the environment, and when switching to vegetarianism I felt so guilty and like a fake activist for being unable to completely lower the one bit of carbon impact I was able to control.

On the internet, so many people preach about how veganism is the only way and any other diet is immoral. They shame the disabled, poor and POC who can't live that life, regardless of whether they would like to. That's not okay.

Don't make us starve and harm ourselves because we can't live up to your white privileged standard. The state of our world is not the fault of disabled people who can't stop eating meat or else risk malnutrition, the state of our world is the fault of big corporations and governments who already hurt us enough as is without the harassment from online vegan ableists. We're doing what we can, and I applaud the people who are able to be vegan, I myself am privileged enough to be able to sustain vegetarianism. I just want you to be kind to those who can't change their diet. Be understanding. Don't blame us for a system that already affects us far more than you.

I am vegetarian. I eat eggs everyday to sustain my protein, and I eat dairy so I don't have to exclude tons of food that my family already buys from my diet; and waste money on food I probably won't even eat. I may not be vegan, but I'm doing my best with the circumstances. So are the other people unable to go vegan OR vegetarian because of disability, food preference, culture, a history of disordered eating, or socioeconomic position. We can all do our part to try and mitigate the effects of climate change, but it begins with stopping the people at the top, not hurting the people at the bottom.

Meh-Day

by Jean or Quinn (any pronouns)



Image description: A design is wood burned into a light tan colored rectangular piece of scrap wood. A sun is depicted at the top and a moon at the bottom. Both have bored or unamused expressions shown in their eyes. Around them are angular and swirled clouds.

Birthday

by Talyn (anything but she/he)

"Happy Birthday!"

They cheer as they light the candles.

Her candles.

I smile of course but can't help but feel like an imposter.

They sing for a dead girl.

Yes, her and I are the same age,

we have the same eyes and nose,

same family, same room, same last name.

Only difference is she felt like an imposter in her own body.

Now she is me and I sit in a room of family

who claims to love and support me.

They sing her name.

All the birthday cards have her name in them.

They say granddaughter, niece, daughter.

Everything is for her.

I don't get a birthday until I later celebrate with my friends.

Then everything is for me.

But for now I sit and blow out the candles

for a girl who will never exist again.

Happy Birthday to her.

Not to me.



Shroom Diversity

by Misty (they/them)

I grew up around the subtropical forests of Mississippi. By high school, I began going for long forays in the woods to decompress from a restrictive social life. There is a festive feeling here during the height of summer. Among the lichened oaks, hickories, dogwoods, and beech trees, patches of mushrooms dance across the ground as eccentric guests of Gaia's luxurious gala. Golden-orange chanterelles scent the air with apricots. Fans of turkey-tails, violet toothed polypores, and pearl oysters overlap like shingles on decaying logs. Poisonous Amanitas flaunt the remnant of their primordial veils like a diamond necklace around their stems. Brittlekills don caps in many styles – stoplight red polka dotted with slug bites, soft green with the pattern of cracked glass, and gradients of gray and brown accentuated by central pimples or dimples. Mats of moss are decorated with hypnotizing concentric circles on the white, indigo, and sienna pilei of milk caps. Burgundy boletes sing spores to the wind alongside coral mushrooms. An invisible cellular network recycles dead matter, engages symbiotic exchanges with trees, and unifies the forest into an interconnected system whose lushness is heralded by the confetti of mushrooms.

Despite this natural array, Mississippi does not generally represent a celebration of diversity in the U.S. Its delays are manifest in poverty and poor education as well as its prevalence of discrimination on the basis of race, gender, sexuality, and religion. Reluctance to change does not translate to the environment, apparently. Replacing forests with gigantic sun-bleached expanses of farmland has resulted in dramatic reductions of biodiversity, making surrounding environments more susceptible to the effects of climate change. Replacing sustainable nutrient cycles with showers of manure and other fertilizers has led to surges in phosphorus and nitrogen levels as well as bacterial infections in bodies of water, often devastating aquatic communities. Where forests are cut and replanted with loblolly pine monocrops, Gaia's festival of symbiotic shrooms is more like happy hour at a lazy speakeasy. Such agricultural patterns are common across the states. The importance of biodiversity seems as invisible as the mycelium below the mushroom.

The same politicians advocating "don't say gay" bills elsewhere in the south, like governors Abbott in Texas and Florida's DeSantis, deny climate change and vehemently resist measures to reduce carbon emissions. The seemingly separate motivations to ignore environmental degradation and enforce homogeneity of heteronormative standards are made reciprocal; in paying their attention to an imaginary queer "threat," leaders ignore the increasingly real one. Where there are floods and droughts, the celebratory mantras of mushrooms are silenced – all the more swiftly when diversity is diminished by human recklessness before the fact, for when one organism fails there are fewer to take its place. There are infinitely many combinations of filamentous fungi, arbuscular glomeromycota, bacteria, protists, and other microorganisms which compose the sustainable soil environments of forests and, ideally, farmlands. Variation is more than natural, it is strengthening. In the same way, every infinitely possible variation of gender and sexuality is valid, equally warranting discussion. I believe that, like the mushrooms of my hometown, our colors shine brighter when we are connected as a community, and the voices flowing from our identities and reflecting the reality we witness can reach more ears when we sing in unison.

Thank You!

Stay tuned for next month's edition
& QYA Zine announcements!

Visit us at:

Website: queeryouthassemble.org

Instagram: @queeryouthassemble

Tiktok: @queeryouthassemble

Twitter: @qyouthassemble

