

# Amplify: A Journal of Writing-as-Activism

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## A Message from the Editors

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Imagine at this moment someone,  
Somewhere in the dark,  
A stranger to you,  
Is looking up at the same sky  
And trying not to cry...

The quiet hum of the fan on the empty tier,  
A simple comfort to me.  
Suppose you could look through my eyes,  
If only for a moment.  
Feel what I feel.  
And touch the hope that is in my heart.

Benjamin J. Hall (1974-2020), from the broadside “The Moon through the Bars”

Ben Hall, our [writing-as-activism accomplice](#) and an emeritus member of the editorial collective for *Amplify: A Journal of Writing-as-Activism*, penned the above lines during his incarceration at the Columbia River Correctional Institution in Portland, Oregon. About the time that Ben was releasing from the Oregon Department of Corrections in April 2020—exiting a confinement of more than 20 years directly into (the start of) a pandemic, with its own inescapable and multivalent brand of chaos and danger and boredom and despair—we began to invent this publication. Working together in a Zoom-based version of Vicki’s “Writing as Activism” course, with its disorienting mix of the familiar and the utterly un-, we determined to respond to a call from the Portland State University Library to propose new open-access journals. In doing so, we thought we might make something from the chaos, the danger, the boredom, and the despair—and reel future accomplices into it.

At long last, you’re “touching” that something now. More than two years after following the “writing-as-activism” thread to the proposing of this journal—two years filled, as we all know, with all kinds of horrors, piling on and on, and resistance, and insistence that there’s an *otherwise* that’s possible, for us and for all—we find ourselves moved by, reconstituted by, and grateful for the works you’ll encounter in the inaugural issue of *Amplify*. In our call for submissions, we invited makers of writing-as-activism to identify *w(h)ere we are*, and they have. Where we are is with one another across time and space: in prison cells and community centers and elementary schools and the streets. Wearing masks—both literal and figurative—and writing a transgressive unmasking. On the receiving end of violence and on the receiving end of care. Offering that care, despite/because of/to heal a suffering. Daring to imagine the stranger looking up at the same sky and drawing comfort there. Making known what we can through our words, and making story, making poetry, making music, with what we cannot quite name.

Welcome, accomplices, to *Amplify: A Journal of Writing-as-Activism*. We’re glad we’re all here.

Vicki L. Reitenauer & Rhiannon M. Cates, Founding Co-editors  
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Vicki L. Reitenauer teaches in the department of Women, Gender and Sexuality Studies at Portland State. A first-generation college student, Vicki has engaged in movements focused on ending apartheid; addressing, healing, and preventing interpersonal violence; and demanding reproductive justice and access to healthcare. Vicki makes poems and essays and contributes to the scholarly literature on transformative/radical/liberatory learning and teaching in various settings, including prisons.

Rhiannon M. Cates works in Special Collections & University Archives at Portland State University Library and co-facilitates programming inside Oregon state correctional facilities. Another first-generation student, her research involves radical and feminist pedagogies, queer historiography, popular culture, and the liberatory potentiality of writing and collaborative learning to enact and embody change and heal individual and community harms inflicted by the justice system.