

How I Keep Looking Up
A participatory project
to create flags of resilience

By Christine Wong Yap
in collaboration with the
John Michael Kohler Arts
Center and contributors

How I Keep Looking Up

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Developed by Christine Wong Yap in collaboration with the John Michael Kohler Arts Center, in conjunction with *Between You and Me*, an exhibition curated by Shannon R. Stratton.

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ChristineWongYap.com
JMKAC.org

Contributors

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C. Holton	Keyanna Martinez
Charlie	Korekiyo Shinguji
Daphne Soetaert	M
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Elizabeth Kaufmann	Madelyn Steinbacher
Elizabeth Passmore	Maliyah
Emma Hovhannisyan	Morgan Pekarek
Emma Karpinski	Nolan Thiel

Introduction

How I Keep Looking Up is a socially-engaged project that invited the public to commemorate the sources of their resilience by designing flags.

We organized online flag design workshops for the public. In the workshops, participants shared everyday coping strategies and examples of finding meaning in adversity. Maddi Spletter, a teacher at Étude Middle School, was instrumental in inviting students to design flags.

Of the 50 flag designs submitted, 40 were by middle school students. I selected 10 designs to sew, based on design, narrative, mental health insights, sewability, and diversity of perspectives and backgrounds. Another flag was sewed by Hannah Jakus. These 11 flags appear in the following pages, supplemented by 16 more designs. Due to space constraints, not all designs could be printed. For the same reason, designers' statements were edited for concision.

Together, these flags represent beloved family members, friends, and pets; coping strategies; and learned skills to reduce anxiety and stress. Strengths like these help individuals and communities endure adversities from the interpersonal level of relationships to the social level of the uncertainty and isolation of a once-in-a-century pandemic.

—Christine Wong Yap

Flag Design Prompts

Contributors designed flags in response to these prompts. Use these questions to reflect, or design your own flag.

Think about your resilience: How do you get back up when life knocks you down? Where did your resilience come from: people, places, experiences, or activities? (Tip: If this seems abstract, think of a specific adversity you encountered and coped with in healthy ways. How did you learn to cope that way?)

Think of images or symbols to represent your sources of resilience. Draw a design for a flag. Try to use simple shapes and symbols. Think about the symbolic use of color. Try to limit text.



EMMA HOVHANNISYAN

I get my resilience from my mother—the strongest person I know. She has helped and supported me my whole life. I’ve witnessed and experienced a lot of bad things as a kid, which has had longterm effects, so I’ve had to adapt and overcome many things, mentally and physically. These experiences have made me a stronger and better person. Many kids my age can relate to this. I hope this flag can represent something bigger than just me.

The eye represents all the things I’ve witnessed and experienced as a kid. It is green ■ to represent **anxiety and mental health**, as well as **rebirth, prosperity, and progress**. Dealing with anxiety has changed me.

I want people to see this flag and be able to connect it to their own personal experiences, good or bad, as a reminder that **broadening our minds will help us understand others so we can all grow as people**.



C. HOLTON

I think my resilience came from this whole Covid thing. A lot of sports got cancelled for me. In school I wasn’t really learning anything, just doing things that my superiors told me to do. But I feel I got back up from things like that, and I kept living every day and doing the things I need to do.

There are two hands holding up a mask, dangling over nothing. One hand is darker in color than the other. Cradled in the mask is a

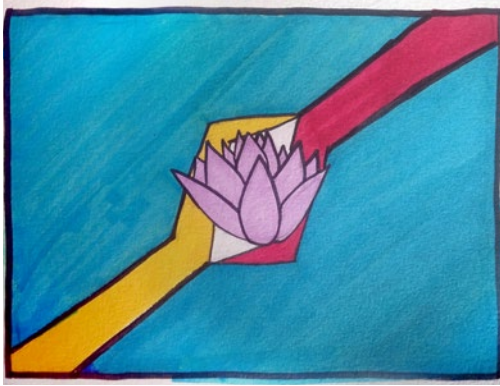
person, laying down on their side with one leg tucked under the other, and their hands under their head. I chose the mask because of the whole Covid thing and how we have to wear masks when we go into buildings now. I put a person in the mask to say that you can take comfort in wearing a mask because it protects you from getting sick, but you could fall at any time—that’s why there are two hands barely holding on to the elastic.

KEYANNA MARTINEZ

My flag is about when I got diagnosed with depression, anxiety, and a behavior disorder all at the same time. When I got diagnosed, I was scared and worried about what it would mean for me. That was two years ago and now I am the happiest I have ever been. Even though I was so scared, my friends and family helped me get through it and helped me get where I am right now and I thank them.

I chose red ■ to represent my anger during that time, blue ■ to show my confusion and how I was sad during that time, and yellow ■ to represent how I am happy now and still fighting. All the colors in the middle are to show how I am still confused and get overwhelmed sometimes. The lines connecting the sides to the circle are my friends and family who help me get through those times.





MADDI SPLETTER

My resilience comes from other people and experiences like getting voted out of a captain's position on a sports team, adapting to my first year teaching without a lot of support, and being diagnosed with anxiety. I would not have been able to make through those moments and realize my strength if not for the people in life who surround me. They allow me to feel sad or hurt but also to know that I have strength.

The background is blue ■ as I need the most support when I am sad or anxious. My most resilient moments do not always make me happy in thinking about how they became those moments. It is usually in the moments of calm where I remind myself how to handle my anxiety or frustrations, of how I overcame things in the past and I can move forward.

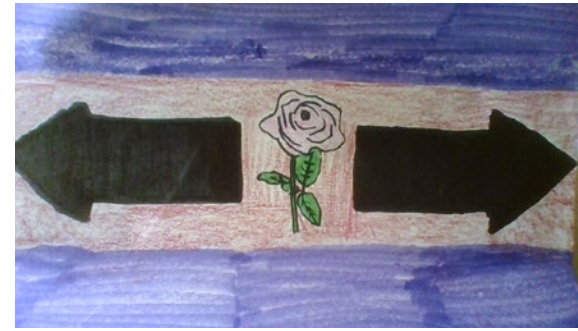
Red hand: My most resilient times involve support I get from others. Red ■ is my favorite color and also stands many times for love. Those that I love tend to support me the most which is why I picked this color.

Yellow hand: Yellow ■ represents hope and

happiness, which is what I find in people who help me through my resilient moments.

Purple lotus: The lotus represents rebirth and enlightenment. After I gain the support I need, I always feel enlightened in how I can view a situation differently or accept myself. It is purple ■ as many purple flowers have meanings and they connect to the joys of youth, gladness, and mental beauty. The joys of youth is something that I want to continue to hang on to as I grow. I don't believe in growing up, but enjoying those things that make you happy, even if it seems childish; always being curious and learning; and **always trying to believe in the good and magic of the world.** Even though, the original inspiration for this symbol comes from one of my favorite TV shows. The symbol in this show represents a society that thrives on learning from other people and stating that all people from different nations are valued.

The white □ background helps highlight that, along with making the lotus flower stand out more.



MALIYAH

On my flag, there are two arrows, pointing opposite directions. Those represent my future and past, because I am always thinking about what will my future look like and what I have done or said in my past.

On my flag, there is a rose in the center. That rose represents my resilience. Not too long ago my great grandma passed away. Her name was Rose. My resilience is counting my life as if she was still here with us.



EPICGAMER69

I have severe anxiety and **I use tools like stress reduction and relaxing** to keep the anxiety from taking over.

The black ■ wave is my anxiety. The blue ■ is ways I find to reduce stress. The green ■ is the way I find relaxation or balance to keep the anxiety from getting out of control.



KAT ZAGARIA

I trace my resiliency to my mother. She was a very resilient person, battling lupus for most of my life, a battle she unfortunately lost. I feel that my resiliency also comes from my undergraduate studio degree, and from being exposed to critiques of my work.

I like to keep my hands busy. My mother was a great baker, though I was too young when she baked to remember the flavors or textures. When I bake today, I often consider how **ancestral traditions of preparing food have crossed continents**. I knew that I wanted to represent this travel in my flag, but I didn't want to put a globe—that seemed too obvious and complex.

I looked up transportation images, including the US Department of Transportation logo. I liked the cyclical nature of the logo, implying that travel will eventually return us to where we began and also bring us on new journeys.

I also realized that the center of this shape formed a triangle, not unlike the *trinacria*. The *trinacria* is the symbol of Sicily, where my family is from. Its triangular running legs symbolize the triangular shape of the island. Like my flag, the trinacria also features wheat.

I decided that my garbs of wheat would each fit within the teardrop shapes that make up the transportation symbol. I placed them on a green ■ ground to symbolize the connection of land that nurtures grain. To symbolize baking, I thought air would be important to represent. **Baking allows something new to be created, seemingly out of thin air**. Similarly, sourdough harnesses the yeast in the air, and that yeast produces yet more air, giving bread its rise. I decided to use the zodiac symbol for air for the flag's overall shape, which is a triangle. To signify the heat of the air that plays a role in baking, I colored the triangle red ■.

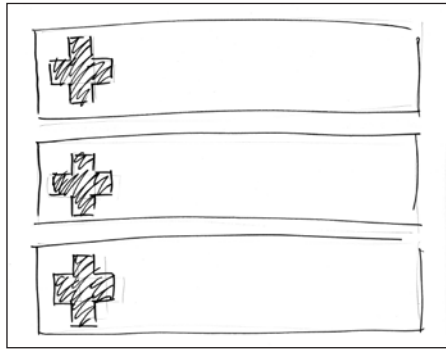


BCO

Integral to my resilience is what I learned from my family. Central to this is a faith that is foundational to all aspects of life. This internal foundation is evidenced by the outward **coping skills** I have developed. My resilience is strong because of the healthy, loving relationships outside of my family throughout my life. All of these people have taught me how to use what I have (physical ability, emotional support, material goods) to cope well.

In the center of my flag is a cross, which represents the faith that I was brought up in. It is central to my being and how I relate to the world. Around the cross is a maroon cross. The maroon ■ is representative of familial love and support. It is right next to the cross because I know the faith that is integral to my life I

learned from my family. The yellow ■ and light orange ■ triangles radiating out represents positivity, joy, humor, and laughter. **I have learned to be joyful in all my experiences and to reframe my state of mind when I am feeling down**. The dark blue ■ circle is representative of the type 1 diabetes community that has been integral in how I have felt supported and learned to live and thrive with a chronic illness. Outside of the dark blue circle is a ■ light blue wave. This is representative of my love of the outdoors, especially water, and all of my favorite physical activities that help me maintain mental wellness. All of this is sewn onto a black ■ background because I hope that I can share what I have learned and enhance other people's resilience.

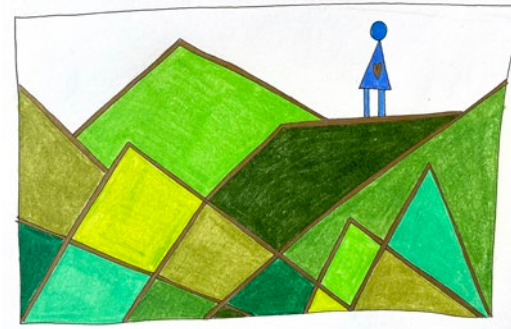


CHRISTINE WONG YAP

Writing and journaling have helped me navigate a lot of difficulties in life, from interpersonal conflicts to grief and illness.

This flag symbolizes an exercise to **write down three good things**. It's a simple but

research-tested practice for finding the positive in the everyday. The human mind has a tendency to process or focus more on negative events. It's important to counter that impulse with intentional practices.



HANNAH JAKUS

My resilience comes from the support of my faith, family, and friends. When I face a challenge I turn to at least one of those supports. That's not to say they always catch me before I fall, but I have never felt abandoned without a hand to help pick me back up. I think that may be something I take for granted. I am reminded that **I am who I am because they are who they are**. They care for me, accept me, challenge me, and forgive me even when I don't feel forgiveness is deserved. **To have a community like this makes me feel eternally grateful and excited to face the next challenge.**

The mountains represents my favorite

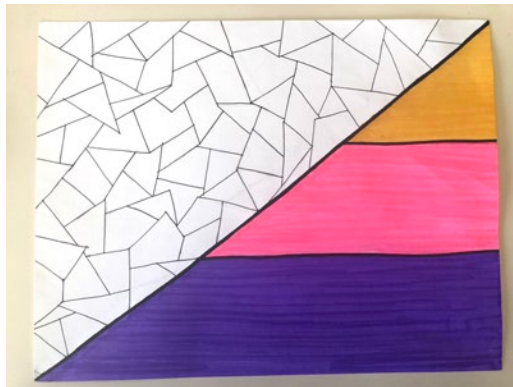
verse, Matthew 17:20: "For truly I tell you, if you have faith the size of a mustard seed, you will say to this mountain, 'Move from here to there,' and it will move; and nothing will be impossible for you." It's a reminder that if I keep my actions grounded in my faith, great things can happen. Also, the view from the mountaintop is always worth the climb. The green ■ shapes represent the patchwork of support that holds me up. The creature with a golden ■ heart is me. Blue ■ is my favorite color. The outline is the golden heart spilling out and connecting the patchwork together. That's a reminder that I am a part of my story as much as my supporters are.

CONTINUED FROM PREVIOUS PAGE

friend. **Something good always comes out of something bad.**

The broken glass represents **the horrible, sad, terrible times that push and shove you around**. The purple, pink, and yellow represents the different people that help me through the hard times. The purple ■ is also

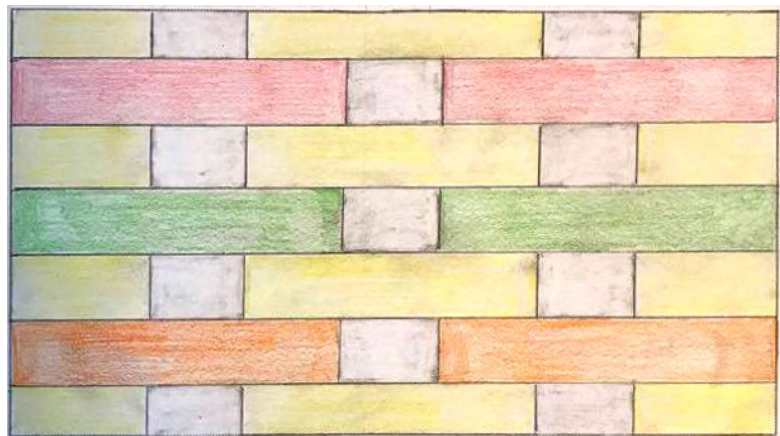
the lowest because it is the gloomiest and shows the hard part you are overcoming in the beginning. The pink ■ represents the middle stage where you are past the hard time, but still think about it. The yellow ■ represents the happiest times when you are in a better situation then you could've imagined.



ELIZABETH KAUFMANN

When I get knocked down I life, I go to my parents, friends, or siblings to help bring me back up. My resilience comes from having a best friend for about 10 years and doing everything with her. Then one day a new girl

comes to be friends with us and they get closer until one day I am not good enough. They feel eager to be mean because that makes them feel better. I go my own way and be friends with others. Now I have a new best →



ANKE WONDER

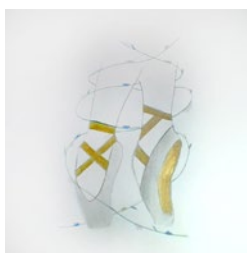
The colors are woven. Red ■ stands for family—anyone who gives me strength and helps me believe in myself and my goals. Green ■ stands for nature, where I find quietness and self-confidence. Orange ■ stands for the vitality of my mind: understanding the past to make better decisions. White □ stands for purity and inner peace. It is woven through because I always try to find purity in my communication with family, in nature, and myself. Yellow ■ is the good I try to see in everything, the trust that everything will work out. This positivity is the fundamental base of my life.

When I was younger, I didn't have any confidence. Then I met Sheen. They're my sibling (chosen family). My broken heart became a bright colorful happy heart. I had the confidence to come out as bisexual and now I'm happy.

The broken heart is sadness. The happy heart is me now. The arms around the happy heart belongs to Sheen, who gave me confidence and made me happy.



JAIDYN



DAPHNE SOETAERT

I am a dancer. Dancing helps me get through a lot of things in life.

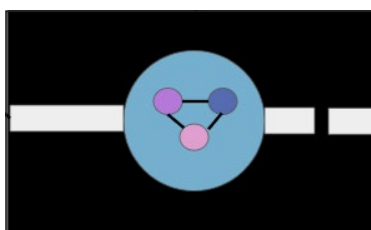
Gold ■: happiness

Green ■: hope

Pink ■: love

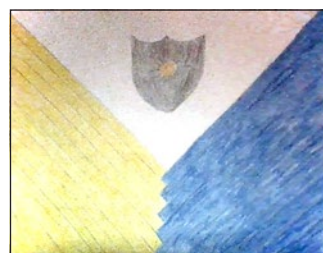
Blue ■: inspiration

Flower vines: partnership, strength, and progress



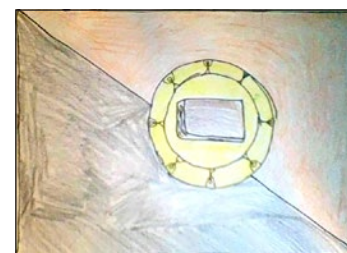
AUDREY McMULLEN

The black ■ represents the negative stuff that has happened to me. The line outside of the circle represents the good. The break is when my parents divorced. The blue circle represents my best friend's pool and my circle with my closest friends. Blue ■ represents safety and peace. The colored circles connected represent me and my BFFs. The lines are how we always support each other.



CHARLIE

The sun shows that in bad times you can always be resilient. The shield shows that there are always people who will protect and support you. Yellow ■ is a very bright and uplifting color. Blue ■ represents calm and shows resilience to me. When people see my flag I want them to feel a sense that even though times can get tough, you can always be resilient and that you have support and protection.



AEDYN B

I've had to be resilient about moving from state to state so many times. I am an extrovert, so the pandemic has been especially hard for me. Friends and family have helped. Grey ■ represents being lonely. Orange ■ represents change. The people keep the change and loneliness away from me. A book represents me because I like knowledge, learning, and reading. Yellow ■ represents happiness.



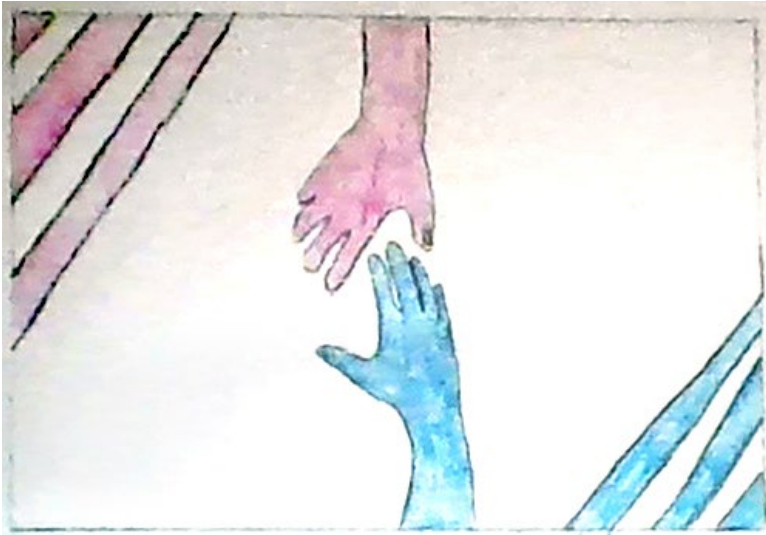
MADELYN STEINBACHER

At my old school I experienced bullying. I was scared to go to school. It's important to pick yourself up, but also to be able to ask for help. Luckily, I have amazing friends, family, and a great second mom, who helped me enjoy every single day. The candle represents me. The darkness represents that hard period of time. The words are a cage or barrier you have to get through the finally meet the light.



M

I often doodle flowers. They represent most people really well. When I think of myself I usually think "weird" and alien—something foreign or new. Spiders are a phobia and if you get caught in the fear, you can't push through. Cobwebs can be used as being stuck, obsolete, or forgotten, because after some time, you have to let go.



JACOBY KNOWLES

My flag represents me being helped up by somebody or even myself during sometimes. The blue hand (my hand) is being pulled up by the pink hand (somebody else's hand). I chose to color the hands that way because blue ■ represents stability, inspiration, and wisdom. I chose pink ■ because pink represents a buddy who is caring, and kindness. I want people to understand that they don't have to rely on other people to get back up in life and they should believe in themselves so they can move further on in life.

My resilience comes from drawing. I used drawing to express emotions that I couldn't put into words.

I chose ■ orange for the base because it's been my most loved color since I was little.

I put drawings of a pencil on a paper and a paintbrush because whenever I'm making art it always makes me happy. I drew a Black Lives Matter hand with the other side of the hand being rainbow because I am a very firm believer that both LGBTQ+ lives and Black lives matter.



ELIZABETH PASSMORE



ANASTASIA KUESTER

When life knocks me down, I hug my frog and talk to my mom about my problems. My resilience comes from people.

The background is blue ■ because blue is a color most people use to represent sadness.

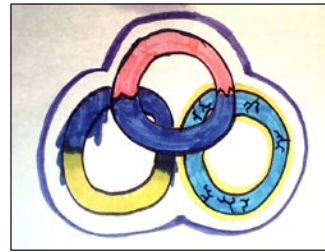


DAVIS KNOWLES

I build myself back up from my roots—my family and things I like to do. I will work to fix the problem.

I got my initial resilience from my parents and the groups that I grew up with who build me up and break me down and to get stronger.

The colors represent protection against the bad colors.



MORGAN PEKAREK

The blue ■ drips represent my struggles with self-confidence. The middle ring represents my family (pink ■), showing I'm connected with my family and they help me. The blue ring ■ represents my friendships—many of them have broken, and totally disappeared. The yellow ■ ring represents me finding the most important people in my life. My friends and family have been my biggest supporters.



NOLAN THIEL

My resilience is me getting through my mom's and dad's divorce using music and my bass guitar. I chose green ■ for COVID and purple ■ for a bruised heart.



EMMA KARPINSKI

At my old school I was bullied, a lot. But I stood up to them.

The heart is my signature. I add it to almost everything I do. The purple ■ represents royalty. Royals stand up for themselves and refuse to be pushed down. The teal ■ means calmness and strength, which is something that I have a lot and resembles resilience.



KOREKIYO SHINGUJI

I chose these symbols and colors because life is very confusing and it looks like a metaphorical herd of zebras.