

a film by NICOLE BETANCOURT

The Unfixing

All change starts with a story.

DISCUSSION GUIDE

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This guide was written by Nicole Betancourt and designed and edited by Rose Kowalski. Thank you to the following advisors: Juan Carlos Zaldívar, State University of New York at Buffalo Professor and award-winning film Director; Mercé Conangla Marin, Emotional Ecology Foundation, President, Barcelona, Spain; Sandra Owén:nakon Deer: Kanien'kehá:ka (mohawk), Wakskaré:wake (bear clan), B.A, M.A, PhD Candidate, Educational Consultant and Curriculum, Language Specialist

1. NOTE TO THE READER

Hello Reader,

I wrote this guide as an inspiration and resource for educators, facilitators, clinicians, artists, and community organizers who want to use *The Unfixing* to explore the connections between personal healing, creativity, and planetary change.

I invite each viewer to listen to their own unique response to this story and how it resonates with them in their own lived experience.

Though this guide is designed for groups, it could also be used as prompts for self-reflective writing or journaling. Keeping a journal where I write my dreams, feelings, ideas, and drawings or collages has been a life-long practice for me and many of the scenes in the film came out of those journal entries.

Please let me know how your discussion goes via theunfixing.com - I would love to hear about it!

Wishing you healing and joy.

Warmly,

Nicole

2. HOW TO USE THIS GUIDE

This guide is designed as a companion to *The Unfixing* feature documentary. It can be used by facilitators in group discussions, by educators in classroom settings, or by individuals for personal reflection. It also serves as a tool to prompt essay writing, deeper inquiry, and creative responses. Select the prompts and activities that best fit your audience or context and add your own ideas.

The Unfixing Discussion Guide can support learning and discussion in areas such as:

- Sustainability
- Climate psychology, emotional ecology
- Art-based healing, art therapy
- Spiritual ecology
- Feminist and intergenerational perspectives
- Systems theory, emergence
- Public health, chronic illness, disability, caregiving
- Creative expression, dreamwork
- Documentary storytelling, transformative personal narratives

3. ABOUT THE FILM

“As you watch the film, I invite you to think of it like a dream. As a dream, you may discover the next day what it means to you.”
— Nicole Betancourt, Director

The Unfixing is a poetic exploration of a mother’s journey from illness to healing, set against the backdrop of an intensifying global climate crisis. Through a textured visual diary, filmmaker Nicole Betancourt captures her body’s unraveling alongside the Earth’s — both requiring new ways of seeing, surrendering, and transforming. The film interlaces the personal with the planetary, showing how individual healing and ecological renewal are deeply intertwined.



4. FILM THEMES

Change

As explained by **adriene maree brown** in the film, the principle of mutual transformation mirrors ecological and spiritual truth — adaptation, impermanence, and interconnection. In *The Unfixing* adriene talks about starling murmurations (birds flocking together), as an example of how social change can emerge through small, **relational shifts**.

“Everything you touch you change. Everything you change changes you.”

— *Parable of the Sower*, Octavia E. Butler

Femininity

Layers of the feminine — **Mother Earth/Grandmother/Mother/Daughter** — echo each other in the film. Nicole experienced medical gaslighting and wondered if women are the “**canaries in the coalmine**” of environmental toxins. Her feminine healing response focused on internal processes and relational dynamics with her body and nature.

Creativity

Bedridden and in pain, Nicole began painting her dreams — an act of gratitude for the freedom and teachings they gave her. Inspired by Frida Kahlo’s work and Butler’s concept of “**Positive Obsession**,” her creative process became her medicine.

“I paint self-portraits because I am so often alone,
because I am the person I know best.”

— Frida Kahlo

FILM THEMES —

Pain

Western mainstream culture often teaches us to resist or numb “negative feelings” such as grief and pain. Yet, denying grief — whether for our own suffering or the planet’s — keeps us trapped in cycles of fear and disconnection. Allowing our pain consciously is to engage with the truth of our experience with compassion. When we acknowledge **eco-grief**, we open space for empathy and creative response rather than paralysis.

Unfixing

When doctors couldn’t “fix” her illness, Nicole began to “**unfix**” herself — loosening the grip of identity and control. Healing came not from conquering pain, but from **listening, receiving, and aligning** with her body and nature.

Story

In systems theory, change often begins below the surface — our stories and beliefs shape the systems we create, which shape our behavior, and what emerges as our reality. By telling new stories — ones that honor interdependence, embodiment, and reverence for nature — we help rewrite both our **neural pathways** (neuroplasticity) and the **collective narratives** of the planet.

“I think it will take a global shift in consciousness,
but actually I think that has been happening.”
— Grandmother Nancy Andry, Healer and Teacher, *The Unfixing*

FILM THEMES —

Earth

Many Indigenous teachings in North America emphasize relational worldviews in which animals, plants, waters, and landscapes are understood as kin or as beings with agency, though these understandings vary widely among nations. In the film, Nicole begins to learn about this from indigenous elders and she begins to seek **relationships of reciprocity** and healing among trees, mountains, and the sea.

“There are messages for us everywhere on this planet.
How can we listen to the help she is offering us?”
— Nicole Betancourt, *The Unfixing*



5. USEFUL DEFINITIONS

These terms are a good launching point for further inquiry into some of the themes in the film.

- **Spiritual Ecology:** A field that explores the spiritual dimensions of ecological awareness, emphasizing sacred interconnection between humans and nature.
- **Emotional Ecology:** The study of how human emotions interact with, are shaped by, and in turn shape the larger ecological and social systems we live within with the goal of living emotionally sustainable lives.
- **Myalgic Encephalomyelitis (ME/CFS) / Long Lyme / Long COVID:** Different, but sometimes overlapping chronic conditions characterized by persistent fatigue, pain, and neurological symptoms following infection or virus, an accident, or other traumatic incident.
- **Systems Theory & Emergence:** A framework that views individuals and ecosystems as interconnected, adaptive systems where small shifts can create large-scale change.
- **Neuroplasticity:** The brain's ability to rewire and heal itself with intention through new experiences, learning, and creative engagement.
- **Art therapy:** The use of creative process as a relational practice for meaning-making, emotional expression, and healing, emphasizing presence and process rather than fixing or curing.

6. DISCUSSION ACTIVITIES

Open Sentences

This practice is adapted from “Coming Back to Life: Practices to Reconnect Our Lives, Our World,” by Joanna Macy and Molly Young Brown. See [video facilitation video by Joanna Macy](#)

If you have a large group, breaking out into smaller groups of two or three people is recommended. Invite participants to complete a series of sentences which you provide one at a time, each with a set window of time to talk - two or three minutes each usually works well.

One person speaks at a time. Decide who speaks first in advance (speaker A and B) and emphasise active listening in silent attention to the person talking. Provide a brief warning before time is up saying, "Take a moment to complete what you are saying and then switch to the next person." A gentle sound (bell or chime) may be used to bring the group to silence before presenting the next open sentence. Afterwards, optional sharing with the larger group can expand the conversation.

Below are some open sentence suggestions to choose from or you can create your own.

Open Sentences about the film:

- I personally related to the scene in the film where...
- The part of the film that made me see things differently was...
- The message of the film is...
- The Unfixing gave me hope for the future because...

Open sentences about the themes in the film:

- One thing I love about being alive on Earth is...
- When I think about what is happening to the natural world, what breaks my heart is...
- It helps me when I express my grief for the world because...
- One thing I've done that made a positive difference, big or small, was...
- My dream for the world is...
- A reminder I'd like to live by every day is...

Questions

These discussion questions can be presented by a facilitator for a group discussion or used for individual writing prompts.

Questions on the themes of *The Unfixing*:

- What does “unfixing” mean in your own life right now?
- How do you respond to pain — in yourself, others, or the planet?
- What stories about illness, healing, or change have shaped you?
- If nature speaks to us, what does a tree teach you? A river? How can you apply what they tell you to your own personal life?
- How do your stories and beliefs change your body and the landscape?

Questions on the filmmaking style of *The Unfixing*:

- How did the personal perspective of the film (as opposed to an objective more journalistic approach) impact your experience as a viewer?
- What was the purpose and symbolism of the animated climate fact cards in film?
- What are some of the different styles of filmmaking in *The Unfixing* and what do you think is the effect of this collage-style?
- What is the symbolism of beaches?

7. INSPIRATIONS FOR GOING FORTH

Below are some ideas for inspiration - this list is not instructional. Only you know what is right for you. Perhaps being still and listening to yourself, or to trees, will reveal a path more than this list.

“You don't need to do everything. Do what calls your heart; effective action comes from love. It is unstoppable, and it is enough.”
— Joanna Macy, Author and Root Teacher of The Work That Reconnects

- **Explore Climate Emotions in Community:** Join a supportive, facilitated group for conversations about climate emotions and resilience. See resources below.
- **Organize a Screening or Presentation of The Unfixing:** Invite Nicole Betancourt or local experts, artists, or activists for dialogue.
- **Create a Grief Memorial for Nature:** A collective ritual to honor environmental loss and renewal.
- **Engage with the Land:** Tend a garden, or simply spend mindful time in nature.
- **Support Chronic Illness Communities:** Offer practical help: meals, errands, or simply your presence.
- **Keep a Creative Therapeutic Journal:** Write, doodle, collage whatever you feel at this moment. No judgment, let it flow. Try the questions above to get you going.

A SYSTEM IS A SET OF INDEPENDENT THINGS

THAT ARE INTER CONNECTED IN SUCH A WAY

THAT CAUSES PATTERNS OVER TIME

8. SUGGESTED RESOURCES

ME/CFS & Chronic Illness Resources

United States:

- [MEAction Network](#)
- [IACFS/ME Clinical Primer](#)

Spain:

- [CONFESQ \(Coalición Nacional de EM/SFC, FM, SQM y EHS\)](#)
- [ASSOCIACIÓ CATALANA PER LA SÍNDROME DE FATIGA CRÒNICA \(SFC\)](#)

Climate Emotions and Spiritual Ecology Resources

- [Good Grief Network](#)
- [Climate Café Network](#)
- [Climate Mental Health Network](#)
- [Climate Psychology Alliance](#)
- [The Work That Reconnects](#)
- [Emergence Magazine](#)
- [Fundació Ecología Emocional](#)

RESOURCES —

Suggested Reading

- A Year with Rilke — ed. Joanna Macy & Anita Barrows
- The Body is a Doorway — Sophie Stand
- Braiding Sweetgrass — Robin Wall Kimmerer
- Coming Back to Life — Joanna Macy & Molly Young Brown
- *Emergent Strategy* — Adrienne Maree Brown
- Is a River Alive? — Robert Macfarlane
- *My Grandmother's Hands* — Dr. Resmaa Menakem
- *Parable of the Sower* — Octavia E. Butler
- Books by Dr. Norman Doidge about neuroplasticity



9. EVENT PROMOTION TOOLS

If you are organizing a screening, please feel free to copy the language and share the images or links that work best for you from theunfixing.com, our [Press Release](#), and this google folder of our [Visual Assets](#).

Possible event description:

The stories we tell of illness, loss, and climate crisis shape our lives — and the land itself. To end cycles of destruction, we must begin with our inner maps. What happens when we stop trying to “fix” and instead listen, feel, and imagine anew?

Join us for a screening and community conversation exploring *The Unfixing* — a poetic documentary that bridges personal healing and planetary transformation.

Please respect our work and do not use these images or video for other purposes without our permission.

10. WHAT EDUCATORS ARE SAYING

“The Unfixing is an evolutionary film featuring the human condition as a reflection of our Mother Earth’s health and healing processes... I recommend this film for all people, and especially our young people who are the next generation(s) of caregivers. It is key that they build a respectful relationship with our Mother Earth and within themselves.”

— Sandra Owén:nakon Deer: Kanien’kehá:ka (mohawk), Wakskaré:wake (bear clan), B.A, M.A, PhD Candidate, Educational Consultant and Curriculum, Language Specialist

“The Unfixing is completely stunning and powerful, making us think and contemplate connections between things that people don’t usually make and the film is groundbreaking in that way. It is visceral, relatable, mystical and spiritual.”

— Alan Berliner, Emmy award-winner, Guggenheim Fellow, and film professor at various NYC colleges

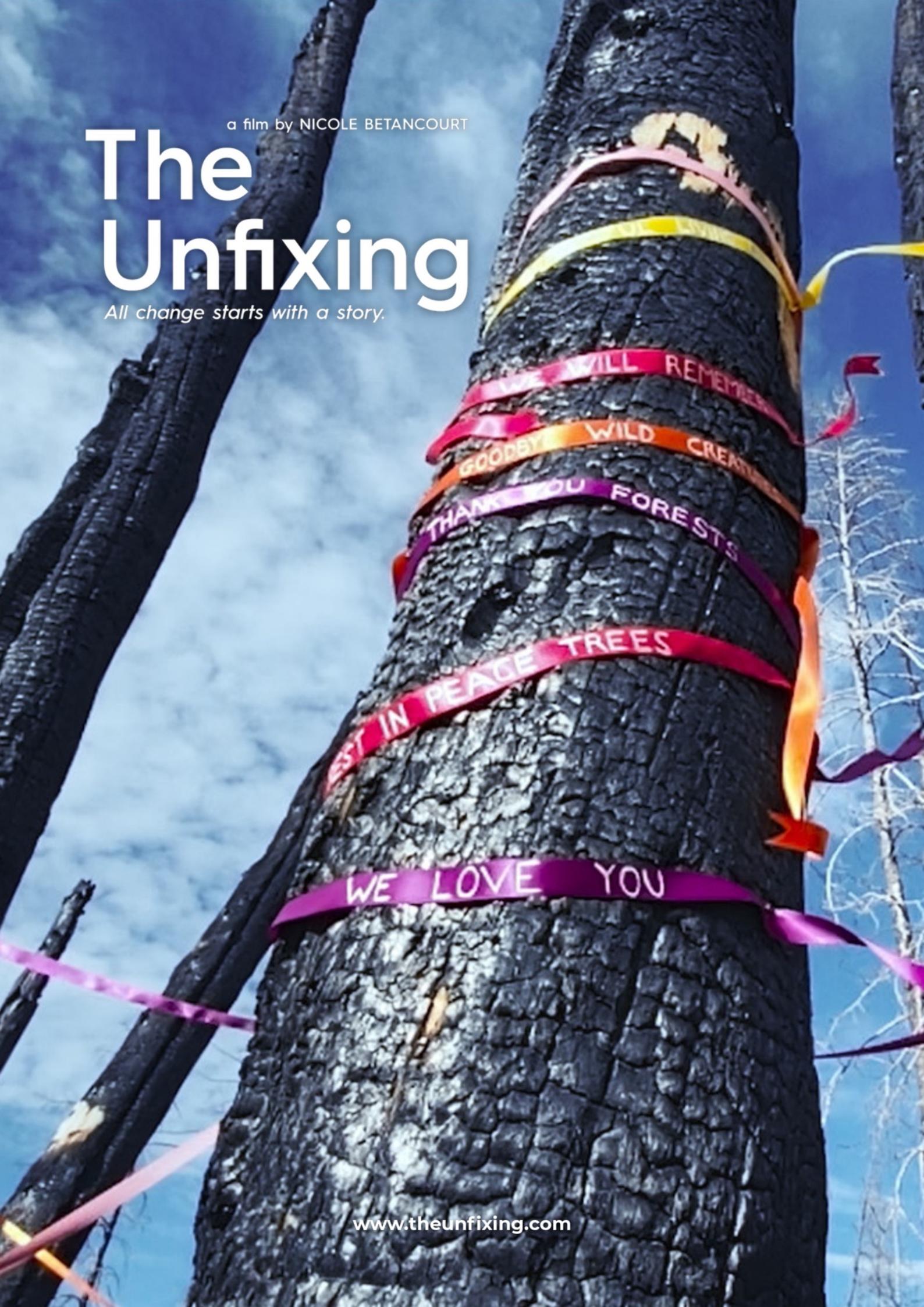
“Through immersion of her entire body in creative process, she seeks to heal herself, her family, and the entire planet in a rhythmic, metaphor laden, narrative, and aesthetic film that promoted a palpable sense of hope in my physical being of nature being capable of healing in ways we, as humans, have not yet begun to understand”

— Mia de Béthune, PhD, ATR-BC, LCAT, SEP, NYU Graduate Art Therapy Adjunct Instructor, Art Therapist

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WE WILL REMEMBER
GOODBYE WILD CREATURES
THANK YOU FORESTS
REST IN PEACE TREES
WE LOVE YOU