

# We Are and I Am the Work



“I am the work.” A remarkable artist named Shyam Bhagat shared this grounding, agitational, peaceful, and resolute phrase with learners at the 2019 National Association of Community and Restorative Justice Conference in Denver, Colorado.

I must own, first and foremost, the responsibility of my personal work—in my beliefs and practices and acts toward self-justice. I find peace in this locus of control and possibility, and still, the phrase propels me to do the internal work so that I might have a positive impact on relationships and systems.

**I am the work.**

It feels to me like this expression captures every responsibility, accountability, possibility, and measure of integrity I might apply to myself.

**I am the work.**

This book, this remarkably privileged invitation to share story with others, is the work.

As I was typing just now, my 9-year-old daughter, Lily, called to me from outdoors.

“Mom!” (pause)

“Becky!” (pause)

“McCammon!” (pause)

**Motherhood is the work.**

If you’re reading this, **you are also the work.** And you’re not alone.

Consider the ways I apply this term to my life:

**I am the work** because I am every day imperfect and always seeking to be more.

And **I am the work** in spite of some days feeling alone and worried that others are not working toward the same values and vision.

**Being the work** means taking responsibility, reflecting, and then not overreaching down a shame pathway.

Trusting to **my work** ahead feels frightening and exhausting and also, fortunately, there are still laundry and dishes to tend to and impulses to smile abundantly.

**I am the work**, anchored in the values of equity, growth, love, and relationship.



# Quinn's I Am the Work

I am the work if I put in the work.

I am the work when I am playing sports.

Being the work is like trying to open up a peanut butter jar.

The work is finishing a homework assignment before it is due.

I am the work trying to be in relationships and also, trying to solve misunderstandings.

I am the work when I go to school.

I am the work when I am in conflict with myself.

**REFLECT:** *What does this remind you of with your students?*

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*With your adult peers?*

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*With your family and loved ones?*

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## **Lily's I Am the Work**

**I am the work** when I trust myself.

**I am the work** when I am helpful.

**Being the work** means asking for help when I need it.

**The work** is the most imperfect part of your most wonderful self.

**I am the work** when I feel included.

**I am the work** when I remember that if I am pretending to be someone else then I lose the best part of me.

**I am the work** when I remember that I am amazing

**I am the work** when I realize a new purpose.

**REFLECT:** *How are you walking around with your 9- and 13-year-old values in conflict, with care, and with both preservation and evolution?*

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**REFLECT:** *Compose your own “I am the work” piece. Feel free to play with the anaphoric sentence frames.*

I am the work \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work \_\_\_\_\_

Being the work \_\_\_\_\_

The work \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work \_\_\_\_\_

## **Belief**

An educator is called to and chooses to work in schools because they believe in the inherent value, possibility, and brilliance of young people and also hold hope that education is a meaningful, powerful space for all. In the next invitation to compose, seek to center your students. For example, here’s how my current role supporting twelve restorative practices pilot site schools and an additional eight implementation sites prompts me:

**I am the work** because within my practice and power is the opportunity to listen deeply to needs, hopes, and learning goals and respond with presence, integrity, and what next steps matter most.

And **I am the work** as someone who needs to consistently check and reconcile my position, title, and influence in relationship to how people feel they can show up with me authentically and I with them.

**Being the work** welcomes my learning curve and what I don’t know blended with huge accountability and responsibility to know and share what I have organized of belief, value, and meaning.

**The work** is messy and gorgeous and familiar and straining and good—in my dang email folders and well beyond.

**I am the work** because I carry with me every professional and personal rubric that threatens to undo me simultaneously.

**I am the work** in harmony and discord with district, classroom, student, family, and community voices and relationships.

**I am the work** because I am not alone and seek to write and live a life my children can feel proud of.

**REFLECT:** *Where does this feel familiar?*

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*What might happen in your school and personal life that prompts the harmony and discord mentioned?*

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## **Your I Am the Work School-Centered Piece**

For renewal, continued reflection, and support, consider returning to this exercise throughout the school year.

**Example:**

I am the work in September.

I am the work before winter break.

I am the work during testing season.

I am the work when the building is hot and students are tired....

I am the work because \_\_\_\_\_

And I am the work in spite of \_\_\_\_\_

Being the work means \_\_\_\_\_

Trusting to my work ahead feels \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work anchored in these values \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work inspired by \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work for \_\_\_\_\_, always.

I am the work because \_\_\_\_\_

And I am the work in spite of \_\_\_\_\_

Being the work means \_\_\_\_\_

Trusting to my work ahead feels \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work anchored in these values \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work inspired by \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work for \_\_\_\_\_, always.

I am the work because \_\_\_\_\_

And I am the work in spite of \_\_\_\_\_

Being the work means \_\_\_\_\_

Trusting to my work ahead feels \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work anchored in these values \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work inspired by \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work for \_\_\_\_\_, always.

I am the work because \_\_\_\_\_

And I am the work in spite of \_\_\_\_\_

Being the work means \_\_\_\_\_

Trusting to my work ahead feels \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work anchored in these values \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work inspired by \_\_\_\_\_

I am the work for \_\_\_\_\_, always.

Sean is a poet. He identifies as African American and works in St. Paul Public Schools; his son Makai also attends St. Paul Public Schools.

## **I Am the Work**

*by Sean Stewart*

**I am the work** of countless blood, sweat, and tears that water my spirit and reflect within the deep currents of the river of humanity.

**I am the work** of ancestral hands that sculpt the monuments of future generations.

**Being the work** is being that guiding force that seeks to restore one's self and others back to their traditional greatness.

**The work** *is* a revolutionary act that begins with a close examination of self and the learned behavior that I adopt as belief.

**I am the work** that seeks the interconnectedness of the world in the eyes of the child.

**I am the work** of the running river that flows continuously into the veins of future generations.

**I am the work** of healing the mind, body and *souls of black folk*.



**REFLECT:** *What meaningful imagery and feelings does Sean's piece inspire?*

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*How might your work tie to what Sean's piece suggests?*

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