A Web of Wisdom

In *Starry Crown* by John Biggers, three women sit passing a thread between them. The women depicted in this painting are known to be female relatives of the artist. The woman in the middle—his mother, on the right—his aunt, and the woman on the left is an unknown relative. This painting is filled with symbols referencing both African and American cultures. For Biggers, women represent the continuation of tradition, and the string that passes between them symbolizes the spoken word that carries knowledge and traditions across generations.

When viewing this work of art, we ask visitors to consider the words of wisdom important women in their lives have shared with them. The responses we receive are heartfelt, funny, sad, silly, and full of joy.

During the spring of 2015, Writer-in-Residence A. Kendra Greene assembled these visitor responses into small booklets called, *Common Thread: Selections of women’s wisdom, guidance, counsel, advice, experience, notions, revelations, hard truths, and plain facts*. At various points throughout the past year, these booklets have been available for visitors to take. These booklets are a way to extend the life of the visitor responses so that even when the work of art is no longer on view, the responses and the message of the work of art still have a presence in our visitors’ lives.

Here are a few of our favorite visitor responses: