

3 Minute Rites of Passage Mira Reisberg's Art, Environment, and Culture Class

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When ARTE 583 Art, Environment, and Culture chose to participate with Gabriel Bizen Akagawa about the "natural" worlds of DeKalb, we decided to create installations and videos about corn: corn myths, history, folklore, horror films (Children of the Corn), ethanol and its hidden social/environmental costs, corn syrup etc. We were going to use can and bottle labels to show the degree of hidden corn syrup, which has been a major contributor to American obesity. We had many wonderful plans, but then the shootings happened on the NIU campus and everything changed.

We decided we needed to address what had happened in our local environment, unnatural as it was. We spoke about guns and gun control, we wondered about what kinds of guidance young people get to navigate into the teenage years and the young adulthood (the profile of all the primarily white, male high school and university shooters). We did research on rites of passage and discovered that most U.S. kids don't get much assistance in navigating this tricky terrain following childhood – guidance seemed to be mostly about what products to buy in order to be cool and fit in. We found that many indigenous people linked this important time of transition, this rite of passage, to nature and a sense of responsibility/connection to their communities. We wondered where nature and the sacred had gone in our own lives and in the lives of our young people. Someone mentioned that the shootings only took three minutes and yet these three minutes were critical – he suggested making a series of three-minute films. We talked about slowing down and being in nature, spending three minutes just being and experiencing a natural place. Each of us committed to make a three-minute video reflection in a local environment.

We also discussed the shootings in terms of random acts of violence, and decided we wanted to counter this with random acts of kindness. Someone else took the lead and invited her high school art students to make acts of kindness cards promoting caring toward people and the environment to give out at the exhibition. Her students were very excited about the project and made many cards. Other art teachers in the class also joined in with their students. Finally, after discussion with Gabe, we decided to have a two toned blackboard to represent hopes and realizations. One side would be what we hoped for, for example, opportunities for kids to spend more time in nature and receive more guidance in navigating life in harmony with the environment and each other. The other side would provide examples of where this was actually happening. Everyone in the class brought ideas to the table, participating through our readings, discussions, brainstorming, and art making.

**Altgelt Museum exhibit responding to NIU shootings
(from exhibit catalog)**



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