

Collage Community Project
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Acknowledgement

We would like to acknowledge the Indigenous people whose stories are shared in this book, and aim to honour their teachings by putting them into theoretical practice without appropriating their culture and stories.

Introduction

Our community's time in physical isolation has created new social dynamics, allowing for our community's members to reconnect with nature, family, and causes that are larger than them. Through this collage of images taken throughout physical isolation, we are able to grasp how our community has adapted and reacted to these changes, and pulled connections from *Braiding Sweetgrass* by Robin Wall Kimmerer in order to apply her teachings in our own communities. Our social determinant in this project is communication. We have created a new form of communicating during this unprecedented time, reconnecting each other as well as ourselves.

Family - Chapter: Sky Woman Falling

None of our friends are originally from Montreal, so after the pandemic was declared they all jumped on the opportunity to move home with their families. A predominant theme in the photos our friends gave to us was family. This demonstrated how they've all been growing closer to their families and reviving relationships throughout social distancing. "And so we say it is the flowing hair of Mother Earth. When we braid sweetgrass, we are braiding the hair of Mother Earth, showing her our loving attention, our care for her beauty and well-being, in gratitude for all she has given us" (Kimmerer, 2013, p.13) Sweetgrass often represented reciprocity throughout the book in the portrayal of Mother Earth's hair. As she cares for us, we must also give back to her, and take time to appreciate her gifts. Our friends have demonstrated their growing appreciation of their families in their photos, and proven it by giving back and helping out the family members who have given so much to them.

Nature - Chapter: Sitting in a Circle

In this chapter, Kimmerer shares a teaching story about her students in a required 5-week class at a wilderness field station. She explains that many of her students are unenthusiastic about the course, and show up seemingly resigned before having even started. In this particular anecdote, Kimmerer explains there was one almost "multipurpose" plant that brought the class together in rekindling or fostering for the first time, a sincere interest and appreciation for their natural environment. This plant, being a cattail serves a multitude of purposes for humans on top of the ecosystem services it provides, from food, to shelter materials, twine, ointment, and more (Kimmerer, 2013, p.266-269) This collage shows how our communities have had the opportunity to reintroduce themselves to nature. Everyone that we got in contact with had at least one picture to show of nature, along with a story to tell. Physical isolation has led to the want and need of connecting once again to the Earth, increasing our experiences and hopefully our connection with our environment. Kimmerer states, "the circle of ecological compassion we feel is enlarged by direct experience of the living world, and shrunken by its lack," (Kimmerer, 2013, p.239).

Interaction with nature has given our communities a new sentiment towards the natural world, growing first-hand experiences and ingraining the importance of giving back to the world we live in.

Cause - Chapter: The Three Sisters

Physical isolation allows one to gain a perspective on the essentials of life. Reciprocity, symbiotic relationships, helping others who in turn help you, these are all aspects that have been prevalent as a result of our mutual time in quarantine. In the chapter, "The Three Sisters," Kimmerer presents the relationship between the bean, the corn, and the squash, as they live together and create a bond that allows their growth to mutually blossom (Kimmerer, 2013, p.155-156). This collage shows the importance of individual change that brought together, instills a collective change in our various communities.

"Individuality is cherished and nurtured, because, in order for the whole to flourish, each of us has to be strong in who we are and carry our gifts with conviction, so they can be shared with others," (Kimmerer, 2013, p.134). For example, the cooking and gardening that is shown dispersed in the collage was shared, and helped create bonds through individual acts. Another cause that cannot be ignored and has shown to be of importance in our community, is the resurgence of the Black Lives Matter movement. Following the death of George Floyd, people protested to fight against racial injustice and enact change. With a global pandemic threatening the lives of many, there are still protesters on the streets, as communities come together to fight for this cause. Seeing the differing ways that cause has arisen during physical isolation shows the importance of having these relationships that allow for individuality to grow and create a better society.

Conclusion

These art pieces brought our friends closer together by giving us a chance to revive our connections that had been drifting since being split apart across the country. As we assembled each piece, we have come to realize there is more present than the one highlighted theme, showing us that cause, family, and nature are overlying and interconnected. We hope that this project can show others a new way to communicate and reconnect with their communities, no matter the distance between them.

Works Cited:

Kimmerer, R. W. (2013). *Braiding sweetgrass: Indigenous wisdom, scientific knowledge, and teachings of plants*. Minneapolis, MN: Milkweed Press.