



The V4 Humanities Education for the Climate. Diagnoses – Best Practices – Recommendations [HEC]

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What do the trees hide underground, transferred to an art gallery.

We talk and discuss “Rhizopolis” by Joanna Rajkowska

Length of the lesson: 90 minutes (the person who conducts the classes chooses the exercises from the list below)

Participants: mainly students of secondary school, as well as older grades of primary school

Subject justification:

We believe, that it is worth talking with students about the exhibition (installation) by Joanna Rajkowska, which took place in 2021 at Zachęta gallery in Warsaw. There is a lot of photos, films, recordings of lectures and interviews, articles on the Gallery’s web site. All of those materials are available to use what should be done¹.

¹ - [informacje o wystawie ze strony Zachęty](#)
- [informacja o wystawie ze strony Artystki](#)
- [film z wystawy](#); premiera 7 III br. (ok. 5 min.);
- texts from Zacheta website:

<https://zacheta.art.pl/pl/mediateka-i-publicacje/z-urszula-zajaczkowska-rozmawia-joanna-rajkowska>
<https://zacheta.art.pl/pl/mediateka-i-publicacje/jednorodna-zgrzyzota-siedem-uwag-dla-mieszkancow-rhizopolis>

-reviews:

<https://przekroj.pl/kultura/niebo-z-korzeni-czyli-mogila-krola-stworzenia-stach-szablowski>
<https://prestportal.pl/wystawa-o-zapachu-trocin-recenzja-rhizopolis-joanny-rajkowskiej-w-zachecie>
<https://www.pismowidok.org/pl/archiwum/2021/29-obrazy-i-wyobrazenia-rasy-historie/nie-istnieje-nic-innego-niz-zalezosc>

Katarzyna Bojarska „There’s nothing more than interdependence”. Reflection on historicity. [Comparison of two exhibitions : „Rhizopolis” by Joanna Rajkowska and „Tu Muranów” at Polin Museum]

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The artist herself and the installation deserve an attention – in terms of reflections about the role of trees in the process of preventing and slowing down the climate catastrophe on the one hand and - introducing environmental elements into the exhibitions halls or urban spaces and the presence of environmental threads in modern humanities.

Objectives:

- in terms of knowledge – providing the students with the information or encouraging them to make a research themselves (about the artist, 18 year old palm, the exhibition in Lublin and Rhizopolis); recalling (reminding) environmental knowledge (in cooperation with other teachers teaching different subjects) about the built, growth and the significance of trees;
- in terms of skills – educating and developing intellectual dispositions and linguistic skills - in relation to "reading" exhibitions and literary or popular scientific texts, expressing in various forms what students saw and read, asking themselves and other people questions, entering roles within the framework of drama agreement;
- in terms of attitude (towards nature, art, and other people and the planet) – encouraging discussion over the responsibility of all the people – teenagers, teachers, artists, scientists and other members of the society – in the best interest of those environmental features, which can prevent the disastrous consequences of global warming and reduce its extent; arousing concern, curiosity, responsibility and respect.

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source: <http://www.rajkowska.com/rhizopolis/>

Suggestions of exercises, methods, forms and work techniques (to choose from by the person who conducts classes)

1. Interviews – with the artist; with the audience, who watch the exhibition:

What does the artist say by her work? What does she want the viewer to reflect on? What kind of emotions does she want to arouse? (assuming the role of the artist, viewers: discussion in a circle).

2. Questions to discuss, asked by the participants of the classes – regarding the exhibition, an artist, visitors or the viewers²:

² Students of polish filology got an assignment to make, to ask the artist and the viewers some questions. The authors of the article owns some very interesting solutions of the problem. Task for students: Ask some questions (up to 10) – concerning the exhibition, the artist, the visitors and the viewers. Why don't you look for some answers by discussing them in a group.

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- Interview with someone in the role of the author of the exhibition.
 - Interview with the viewers: someone in the role of a journalist. A survey, longer interview with two or three people.
 - Discussion in the circle about the exhibition – symbolism of what is below and what is above?
 - Can the tree stumps provide a shelter? Weather they create a graveyard, associated with cemetery park or graves in the forest? Is it possible that the human's home is situated underneath the tree roots? If one hang the tree stump on the ceiling making a vault, will it make trees more valuable, sacred, will it resemble a gothic cathedral?
 - What is the value of what is already dead?
 - Why do people cut down trees?
 - How to make them stop cutting down trees?
 - Underground world – our heaven?
 - What lies underground?
 - In case of disaster, can the rescue be found underground?
 - What do we know about underground world?
 - Does our knowledge affect the way we see the tree roots?
 - What is rhizome? What does it resemble?
 - How do we feel in contact with the underground?
 - What with? Who with? do we contact in underground space?
3. The discussion about how did we feel in exhibition space?

At the exhibition – almost dark, but dry and quiet; nice smell, warm, nice space which means that trees gives human a shelter. Friendly asylum (?); it's a place where one can feel good and safe; isolated from the threats, which he simply cannot see, calm and quiet. But – closed space; claustrophobic feelings, being aware, what is no longer there – the sky, treetops, plants, the world which we once knew, it's like in a grave, sad; it's a pity that there once were trees, and we wouldn't be able to see them anymore, we

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would never stand under the treetop again, we wouldn't touch the trunk, branches, leaves, we would never hide in their shadow.

4. Cutting trees/ passing away – exercises using drama techniques.
 - Enter the role of a tour guide – you are walking in the woods with a group of people, you bring objects, processes, looks to their attention.
 - With your facial expression, gesture, body position show what you feel, watching cutting down trees and seeing a tree that has been already cut down (sadness, terror, despair, rebellion, other)
 - Using freeze-frame technique show those situations: before, during and after logging.
5. Film exercises:
 - Making a film – before, during, after ... consolidation of cutting down process. What happened to those trees? What's going to happen?
 - Write a script of a film scene, which could be performed at Rhizopolis.
6. **Creative writing:** Imagine that you live near the forest. Write a letter to someone close to you and explain what have happened: Once there was a forest, there is no forest anymore! (What do you see, what do you know, what do you feel, what would you like to do about that? What happened to those trees? What's going to happen?)
7. **Photo and sound project:** observation, how does the wooded neighbourhood change and taking photos, for example once a week same day, same time during the whole semester; also recording sounds which accompany the view.
8. **Photo assignments:**
 - walk along the neighbourhood and take some photos of roots' traces or newly planted trees in your town. What lesson do you learn from watching trees in your neighbourhood? Is the tree stand old or young? How many traces of tree logging can you see? Can you remember how did those places looked like just a few years ago? You can also look for archive photos on the internet: Google Street View resources, National Digital Archive, Digital Poland or local sites.

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- Go to the nearest forest and take some pictures of it. Select your point of view (from the bottom, from above, straight ahead), closeup, wide shot etc. Compare with the photos by Pierściński from the series "Fir forest".
9. Watch the posters made by Ryszarda Kai. Look for the information about the places, which are presented on those posters. Figure out, why did the artist present trees on those posters. Can you recognize those trees? What symbolic meanings do you notice on those posters? Draw the roots (by hand or using computer) on the poster chosen by you. How do the poster's composition, aesthetic and the meaning change?

Sample posters: [Lusławice](#), [Ameryka](#), [Sady Grójeckie](#), [Żarki](#), [Polska](#), [Biebrza](#)

10. Art exercises: draw or paint, how would the ground look like if the tree stumps shown on the posters were still the tree roots.

11. Imagine you are a tree:

- Get familiar with the description and videos involving asana practise in yoga. Do the Vrkasana (a tree asana - pay attention to the possible contraindications described here)
- How did you feel in asana? Why is it called a tree? What was the meaning of the leg work, that you stand on?
- If you have the opportunity try to perform asana in the plener, among the trees. Ask someone to take a picture of you, or look at the photo attached to the exercise and think, in what aspects the position like this makes people look like a tree.

[A comment: In yoga, coming from ancient Indians Self-improvement and development philosophy, the task of some asanas (body positions) is to make the body stronger, they help with gaining the physical and mental balance. One of the asanas is called the tree asana- Vrkasana (Vrksha in the Sanskrit means a tree). Just like a tree the asana should be well established in the ground (standing firmly on the leg). The position makes the stomach muscles stronger, it also helps to keep our balance, and it teaches us concentration and stabilization.

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Attachment to the exercises:



fot. Bartłomiej Pająk

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Anex

1. About other installation made by Joanna Rajkowska:

- [„Greetings from Alej”](#) – Rajkowska’s palm (recorded message of the palm - 18 years old; Brodka speaks)
- [a letter from the Palm – text](#)
- <https://culture.pl/pl/dzielo/joanna-rajkowska-pozdrowienia-z-alej-jerozolimskich>
- An exhibition in Lublin (2017): [„Ja do waszego nieba nie wejde”](#); Cyrulicza street
- [„Pasaż Róży”](#) in Łódź

2. An extract from an essay by Stanisław Łubieński about trees, dying, because of concreted oaks on Rakowiecka Street in Warsaw, in front of the renovated building of the Music School [deletion made by the authors of the script]:

The roots remain invisible, we are not aware of their importance. In the meanwhile we can put the plant’s brain in the root - trees take up water and mineral salts through them, breathe, but also communicate with their neighbors. And, of course, they stabilize the tree in the ground. We ask: why does it collapse? Sometimes it’s simply enough to remember, what happened just a few years earlier: during the curb renovation somebody cuts its roots or cars parked on them. A tree rarely dies with a sudden death. The signs, that its condition becomes worse are visible, but it is crucial to spot them.

Trees growing in towns are facing especially hard fate. They are spending they whole life in a place they didn’t choose, they are exposed to a smog and winter salting. They cannot run away. The roots of Warsaw trees have to find a way to anchor themselves on a rubbles and ruins of a town, which remain under our feet. Trees live at all cost, fighting desperately for each drop of water, for a space for their roots, but they do not protest, they do not threat with a tangled roots. They are able to get used to difficult conditions, but their flexibility becomes smaller and smaller every year. “ You don’t replant an old tree” – an old polish proverb says a

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lot about the nature of a tree. It must be understood a little more broader – old trees don't like changes in their surroundings. In the end, it's also possible to say that the trees are conservative.³

3. About plants in art galleries (from the series „New definitions”) A plant similar to animals participates in an art history in an active or passive way. It can be a tool as well as a contributor. A tree, a bush, a fruit, a seed - each of those can be used and transformed into something new by an artist⁴.

4. [„Studia Poetica” Tom 8 \(2020\)](#): Dendography and dendrology in literature. Scientific edition by Magdalena Roszczyńska.

³ S. Łubieński: *Trees can't run away*. *Magazyn Gazety Wyborczej*. Sobota, 24 lipca 2021, s. 24.

⁴ sztuka24h.edu.pl/?p=6234

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