

# THE MAYORS OF SHIPROCK

## VIEWER DISCUSSION GUIDE



**Top:** Christian Lee (Diné) leads NDYC members into trash pick-up day. Photo by Kelly Byars (Choctaw)

**Above:** Eliseo Curley (Diné) weaves at home. Photo by Jessie Weakee (Diné)

**Right:** North Diné Youth Committee (NDYC) with Shiprock. Photo by Kelly Byars (Choctaw)



### Program Synopsis

Every Monday in the small community of Shiprock, New Mexico, a group of young Navajo leaders meet to decide how they will help their community. For more than seven years, the Northern Diné Youth Committee (NDYC) has worked to give youth opportunities to directly make changes within their community. But while the NDYC works to make changes locally, many members also consider their own futures, commitments to family and the world outside of the Shiprock. While they love their community, they all must consider their options both on and off the reservation.

The Northern Diné Youth Committee has brought consistent change in the community of Shiprock by promoting and organizing community trash clean-ups, graffiti removal, fundraisers, wood hauling for the elderly, volleyball and dodge ball community tournaments to name a few. But by far, their most significant contribution has been to engage the youth of the community and help them be a part of such a transformational effort—an effort which should prove to inspire every community member.



### In Their Words

“I really do truly feel that we can change our community, we can change our nation. We just need to put our minds and knowledge together, and get it done.”

— Graham Beyale (Diné)

## Producer Comments



### Ramona Emerson (Diné)

We first met Graham Beyale, one of the founders of NDYC, on the set of another film that we were shooting in Shiprock almost six years ago. It didn't take long for us to find out about the work Graham had begun in town. It was easy to

see how devoted to his community he had become. I asked him if he would ever consider allowing us to make a small film about what he was doing and he agreed. Within a year we were shooting.

We had originally called the film *The Mayor of Shiprock*, concentrating on Graham as our main story point. He was never comfortable with that role and halfway through production he came to us and said something that changed everything. He said, "It's not about me, it's about we."

The film was not easy to make. We made at least 50 different trips to Shiprock to film the members of the NDYC, collecting well over 70 hours of footage. We were invited into members' homes and into the collective community of Shiprock. It was inspiring to be around so many youth who wanted to make change. We have come to know and love all of the members of the Northern Diné Youth Committee as we watched their lives flourish and grow in front of our cameras.

As a director, I have always made a conscious effort to make films about my community because I knew that if I wanted those stories to exist, I was going to have to make them a reality. Making documentaries like *The Mayors of Shiprock* allows me to tell the story of what is happening in my community today and how our lives are unfolding in real time. It's the truth and that is what is most important to me.

## Discussion Questions

1. In the opening of the film, Graham Beyale says, "I can see it. And I can see we can do it." It is clear that this young man can look at all of the issues within his community and "see" how it could be different. Explore and discuss what role this ability to have vision or to "see" a different future plays in good leadership.
2. The actions of one or two people with vision and initiative can inspire or invigorate positive change within a community. Identify some of the specific improvements that you saw either in individuals (self-confidence, fellowship) or in the community as a whole (a new park, trash clean-up) that may have been mobilized by Graham and the NDYC.
3. Explore and discuss why losing three of his grandparents to alcohol abuse may have inspired or motivated Graham to get more involved with his community. Share a personal story of how a sad or unfortunate circumstance has changed or motivated you toward a new goal.
4. Throughout the film several of the young people expressed feeling that the older generations of their community often put up barriers rather than offering support for their activities. Explore and discuss the dynamics between generations that sometimes can stop or slow down progress. Consider why this might be and what the possible solutions are for these complex human dynamics.
5. What social or emotional elements do you think exist within the activities that NDYC creates that are helping the young people stay clear of gangs or destructive behaviors?



Playground painting in Nizhoni Park. Photo by Rhiannon Bainbridge (Diné)

## By the Numbers

1. NDYC stands for the Northern Diné Youth Committee which was started seven years ago by Graham Beyale.
2. The NDYC was founded on April 22, 2010 by Graham Beyale, his sister Virginia and a core of early members.
3. In the film, the Navajo name for the large, volcanic rock formation is Tse' Bit' ai', which means "the winged rock."
4. The Shiprock formation was caused by a volcano that did not erupt. Pressure built below and formed the "plug" that is the jutting rock formation, which is made of an unusual, highly potassic magma composition called a "minette," thought to form by very small degrees of melting of the earth's mantle.  
(New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources)
5. The main part of the Shiprock landform is 600 meters high and 500 meters in diameter.  
(New Mexico Bureau of Geology and Mineral Resources)
6. The town of Shiprock, New Mexico, is the largest town on the Navajo Nation with a population of more than 8,000 people. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2010)
7. The average household income of the residents of Shiprock in 2015 was \$32,324. (U.S. Census Bureau, 2015)
8. On Aug. 5, 2015, a disaster at the Gold King Mine in Silverton, Colorado, caused more than 3 million gallons of toxic mine waste to be released into the watershed leading into the Animus River, a major source of water for the area. The Animus turned orange for several days after the spill and continues to be an environmental concern.  
(Environmental Protection Agency)
9. It is estimated that more than 2,000 Navajo farmers and ranchers were impacted by the Gold King Mine spill. (Navajo Nation)



Earth Day sign at the Shiprock Chapter House. The event is managed by the Shiprock Chapter House and the NDYC. Photo by Kelly Byars (Choctaw)

## Suggested Activities

1. In the film Graham says, "One of the main problems with the Navajo Nation, the people of the Navajo Nation, is that they expect things to be done for them." Research and learn about the terms "colonization," "oppression," and/or "historic trauma," and write a three-paragraph description of how historical events may have developed the kind of expectation or dependency to which Graham refers.
2. Continue the above exploration and describe how you feel the actions of the youth of NDYC are helping one another and their community to "resist oppression," as stated by Moroni Benally in the film.
3. Using the actions and intentions of the NDYC as a model, examine what your own community needs and mock up a "plan of action" that you would put into place to begin a similar leadership movement in your community. What would it entail? Who would you need to help? What resources would be required?
4. "Leadership" can be an elusive term. Identify specific actions or statements from the film that you think demonstrate "good leadership." Then analyze these actions or statements and identify the common elements such as selflessness, personal initiative, etc., that you see present in the members of the NDYC.
5. Using the common elements that you defined above, examine yourself or members of your community (either local or national). Do you or the leaders in your community have some of these same elements or traits? Which elements are lacking? What could you do to personally develop stronger leadership skills?
6. It is clear that the NDYC would not have grown and developed without the key leadership and commitment of Graham and the other core members of the committee. One person can make a difference. Identify individuals throughout history that exhibited this kind of leadership and were able to make significant changes in the world.

## Resources

### Websites - Film & Landmark:

<http://www.shiprockexperience.com/>

<https://twitter.com/tmosthefilm>

<https://www.facebook.com/TheMayorsOfShiprock/>

<http://www.imdb.com/video/wab/vi627553817>

<https://geoinfo.nmt.edu/tour/landmarks/shiprock/home.html>

### Articles:

<http://www.daily-times.com/story/news/local/navajonation/2016/07/08/grant-awarded-film-shiprock-group/86863376/>



Eliseo Curley (Diné) butchers a sheep. Photo by Brittany Tsosie (Diné)



Rhiannon Bainbridge (Diné) and Eliseo Curley (Diné) learn how to felt wool. Photo by: Brittany Tsosie (Diné)



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This Viewer Discussion Guide was developed by Jamie Lee, an author and former instructor at the Oglala Lakota College, where she taught for five years. Lee has a master's in human development and has been a communications trainer and an educator for the past 30 years. Her stories and articles have appeared in *The South Dakota Review*, *Winds of Change Magazine* and several other anthologies. She has published three non-fiction books, a novel and a collection of writings from Oglala Lakota College students. Her first novel, *Washaka: The Bear Dreamer*, was a PEN USA finalist in 2007. Lee has written more than 70 documentary programs, including Public Radio's landmark 52-part Native music series, *Oyate Ta Olowan: The Songs of the People*.

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Educational resources for this film are available at <http://www.visionmakermedia.org/educators/mayors-shiprock>

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