



LESSON PLAN

Protecting Wilderness



RELATED FILM

Among Giants

BY RAINHOUSE CINEMA



Key Idea

Clear-cutting and logging have detrimental effects to redwood forests and the environment, impacting the local biodiversity and creating frequent mass erosion. Environmental advocacy groups use creative strategies for wilderness preservation.

Background

In the past 20 years, 435,000 acres of California forests have been clear-cut, causing irreversible damage to California's coastal redwood region. Deforestation, or the permanent removal of forests, negatively impacts the health of the environment causing ocean runoff, flooding, greater levels of greenhouse gases, soil depletion, and habitat destruction. According to the National Park Service, the average age of the redwood tree is between 500-700 years old, with some living up to 2,000 years. Of the original old-growth coastal redwoods, 96 percent have been logged. Known as "super trees," the redwoods are unique in their size, beauty, and history, as well as home to many species.

In this film, "Farmer," an activist for Earth First! Humboldt risks injury and incarceration to live in the canopy of an ancient redwood tree. Earth First! Humboldt is an environmental advocacy group based in Northern California dedicated to preventing the clear-cutting and deforestation of redwoods by organizing tree-sits and roadblocks. In 2008, activists discovered a timber harvest plan that would have clear-cut 40 acres on the west side of the McKay Tract, a 7,500-acre forest near Eureka, California, known for the growth of unique redwood trees. Green Diamond Resource Company once owned the forest and the County of Humboldt proposed this area for residential development. The activist for Earth First! ultimately protects a rare redwood ecosystem, an important part of California's natural history. After four years into the tree sit, the Green Diamond Resource Company sold 1,800 acres of the McKay Tract to the trust for public land and the area now is a protected community forest.



Film: 13 minutes

Class: 60 minutes

SUBJECT AREAS

HIGH SCHOOL

- Anthropology
- Environmental Science
- Modern World Studies

COLLEGE

- Cultural Anthropology
- Environmental Studies

THEMES

- Courage
- Empathy toward nature
- Environmental justice
- Individual activism

MATERIALS

- Online access to the film
- Equipment for showing film

PREPARATION

- None



Connections to National Standards

Connections to National Standards Common Core English Language Arts. SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5. Make use of digital media (e.g., textual, graphical, audio, visual, and interactive elements) in presentations to enhance understandings of findings, reasoning, and evidence and to add interest.

College, Career, and Civic Life (C3) Framework for Social Studies State Standards. D2.Civ.7.9-12. Apply civic virtues and democratic principles when working with others.

Next Generation Science Standards. HS-LS2-7. Design, evaluate, and refine a solution for reducing the impacts of human activities on the environment and biodiversity.

Lesson

SETTING THE STAGE

Introduce the film by telling students that they will be watching a film about a young environmental activist who risks his life to protect an old California redwood forest. Ask students to think about what they might protect or defend that is important in their lives.

Many young people around the world are making a difference. For example, seventeen-year-old Malala Yousafzai won the Nobel Peace Prize for her activism with female education. Eight-year-old Cayden Taipalus of Michigan stood up for his friend who was denied a hot school lunch. He began collecting money and raised \$64 to pay off students' lunch program accounts. This sparked a worldwide movement, where donations were made to pay off lunch balances for low-income kids.

Ask students: What is an issue you are facing as a student at your school? What might you do to express your opinion about this issue in your school community?



ENGAGING WITH THE STORY

Direct students to note as they watch the film how the young activist has an unwavering commitment to the cause of saving this particular redwood forest or grove. Students should observe how his dedication resulted in a positive action. They should also observe the impacts, big and small, of his decision to sit in a redwood tree for three years.

Delving Deeper

After viewing the film, lead a discussion with such questions as:

- The film states that over 435,000 acres of California forests have been clear-cut since 1990. Clear-cutting is a logging practice in which most trees in an area are uniformly cut down, causing major environmental damage. Many environments in the U.S. are under threat. The Palisades, a scenic landscape along the Hudson River in New Jersey is endangered and it may be replaced by an office tower. Theodore Roosevelt National Park in North Dakota, as well as public land around the country, is at risk due to fracking, a process that extracts natural gas from rock that is deep underground. Fracking threatens drinking water, air, and the health of those who live nearby. Which one of these would you like to save? Why? Is there another place that you can think of that is worth protecting?
- Farmer said that he feels a sense of freedom in the forest that he doesn't feel in an urban landscape. What do you think about this statement? Do you think his "sense of freedom" contributed to his action to save the forest?
- Farmer had to maintain his tarp system as well as collect firewood for his wood-burning stove, among other duties. Would you give up living a comfortable life to devote your life to a cause? Why or why not?
- Do you think young people, like Farmer, have what it takes to positively impact the world we live in? Why or why not?
- What if Farmer decided not to tree sit in this redwood grove? What would have been lost for society? For nature? For Farmer personally?



Protecting Wilderness

- Why do you think the filmmakers incorporated aerial cinematography towards the end of the film? What effect did this have in the film's message?
- Have you ever fought for something you believed in and felt alone while doing it? What was the cause or outcome?

Reflecting and Projecting

Give students one of the following reflective writing prompts to demonstrate their understanding of the story. (Note for teachers: Just as quotes from a book or text are used to prove an analytical thought, students use the film to justify their reasoning.)

1. "It's too easy to put the blinder over your eyes and pretend that everything is alright," says Farmer in the film. What do you think he means by this statement? How might this statement apply to something you've witnessed or experienced in your own life? How can a perspective like Farmer's fuel one to act in support of the environment? (NGSS.HS-LS2-7)
2. "Anybody who puts their mind to it has the potential to make a lot of change," says Farmer in the film. Do you agree with this statement? How can one's commitment contribute to reaching a goal, big or small? What decision did Farmer make to protect the redwoods? What can you take from his decision and apply it to your own life? (CCSS.ELA.SL.9-10.5 and SL.11-12.5)
3. Do you think that protecting the redwoods makes Farmer a responsible citizen? Do you think there is value to his action? Why or why not? What if Farmer got arrested? Choose an argument for his defense as well as an argument for the prosecution. (C3.D2.Civ.7.9-12)



Resources

(Community website) [Earth First! Humboldt](#).

Joel Bourne, "[Redwoods – The Super Trees](#)." *National Geographic*, October 2009.

Julia Butterfly Hill, *The Legacy of Luna: The Story of a Tree, a Woman and the Struggle to Save the Redwoods* (San Francisco: Harper, 2001).

Rick Bass, "[The War of the Senses: The Battle for the Heart of America](#)." *Orion Magazine*.